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New York

President:	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein	(Jordan)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estreme
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Araud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Luxembourg	Mr. Asselborn
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Cho Tae-yul
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda	Mr. Nibishaka
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Power

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.05 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to start by congratulating Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I would also like to commend the Permanent Mission of France for its excellent stewardship of the Council in December.

(*spoke in English*)

Last July, when we spoke before this Council, we commended the efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry towards the resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in the hope that they would lead to a just and lasting peace, which in our view can be based only on the principles and rules of international law, the relevant decisions of the United Nations, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. However, we also said — and I apologize for quoting from our own statement:

> "Still, let us state it loud and clear: the main danger facing such negotiations is the continuation of provocative Israeli actions capable of undermining them. To protect the negotiations, those actions ought to be completely stopped. Obviously, there is no better example of such actions than the unabated construction in the past months of Israeli settlements at an unprecedented rate, let alone the approval of new settlement units." (*S/PV.7007, p. 31*)

In October, we sounded the alarm anew, drawing the attention of the Council once more to the dangers of the unrelenting Israeli settlement activities to the prospects for the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, and we called on the Council to condemn them in the strongest terms (see S/PV.7047). While the Council remained silent, the roar of the Israeli bulldozers destroying Palestinian homes in Jerusalem and uprooting olive trees in the West Bank to pave the way for yet more settlements could be clearly heard. As has already been mentioned, the Israeli authorities announced earlier this month their intention to build 1,400 new housing units in the occupied territories.

We are sure that you, Mr. President, realize that we are at a historic crossroads. To say the least, the future of the negotiations has undoubtedly been put in jeopardy by the unabated settlement activity. The silence of the Council does not serve the cause of peace. To save the prospects for peace in our part of the world, the Council ought to make itself heard. For the sake of peace, we urge it to act without delay.

Let me turn now to another challenge facing the Council. Last week, on 15 January, at the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, hosted by the Government of Kuwait, the figures spoke for themselves with regard to the magnitude of the Syrian tragedy — over 120,000 people killed, including about 11,000 children; 9.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance; 6.5 million internally displaced; and 2.2 million refugees in neighbouring countries. It is a humanitarian catastrophe that is unprecedented in recent history. Lebanon welcomes the generous pledges made during the Conference and will continue to work closely with the donor community to alleviate the suffering of the refugees and their host communities.

As the conflict unfolds in Syria, the flow of refugees into Lebanon continues unabated at an average rate of 3,000 a day. Months ago, the number of refugees exceeded 1 million, which is almost a quarter of the population of my country. Clearly, that has begun to have an existential dimension in Lebanon, which is the smallest of the host countries but has the highest number of refugees, whether in relation to the population of those countries or in absolute terms.

The suffering of the Syrians in Syria must end, and the flow of Syrian refugees must stop. It is high time that the international community assume its humanitarian responsibilities and act with one voice so as to ensure humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid to Syria and establish camps within Syria and on its borders. That could allow for the dignified and gradual return of Syrian refugees from the host countries to their own nation. To all those who may believe that approach to be unrealistic, allow me to say the following. Aware of its humanitarian responsibilities and legal obligations,

Lebanon has kept its borders open to all those fleeing the horrors of violence and destruction in Syria and will continue to do so. It is unrealistic here not to acknowledge that Lebanon can no longer cope alone with the pressures and burdens resulting from that situation.

Moreover, since the Council succeeded in unanimously adopting resolution 2118 (2013) on the elimination of chemical weapons in Syria, is it unrealistic to hope that it could still show a similar commitment in addressing the humanitarian situation there? More importantly, on the eve of the date set for the second Geneva Conference on Syria, is it unrealistic to also hope that that same international leadership will be renewed to ensure the full implementation of the June 2012 Geneva communiqué and its action plan (S/2012/522, annex) in order to help fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people and put an end to their ongoing ordeal?

Despite all the challenges facing my country, Lebanon remains committed to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and stresses the need for the Council to act swiftly so as to put an immediate end to the systematic Israeli violations of Lebanon's sovereignty by land, air and sea. My delegation has kept the Council informed of those violations and has requested that its letters to that effect be circulated as official documents of the United Nations.

The most recent of those letters was dated 9 January, when we submitted a complaint against Israel for launching electronic warfare on Lebanon. We informed the President of the Council that Israel had increased the number of sites, towers, antennas and other monitoring, espionage and surveillance devices installed along the Lebanese border. We called on the Council to assume its responsibilities in the maintenance of peace and security by condemning such blatant violations of international law and by taking the necessary measures to put an end to them.

Recently, my country was also the victim of several terrorist attacks, from the targeting of the Iranian Embassy to the assassination of former Minister Mohamad Chatah, the car bomb in the southern suburbs of Beirut and the attack in Hermel. Time and again, the Council condemned those attacks and stressed the need to bring the perpetrators to justice. Lebanon expresses its deep appreciation for the Council's continued support for its stability and security.

Furthermore, last week, the Council welcomed the beginning of the trial proceedings of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and stressed the vital importance of combating impunity so as to strengthen the long-term stability and security in Lebanon. In turn, the President of the Republic of Lebanon, General Michel Sleiman, clearly stated that the start of the trials was a sure step towards uncovering the truth behind the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and would ensure that the perpetrators did not think that they could evade justice.

Finally, the launching of the International Support Group for Lebanon in September was based on the consensus expressed in the presidential statement adopted in July by the Council (S/PRST/2013/9), which stressed "the need for strong, coordinated international support for Lebanon to help it continue to withstand the multiple current challenges to its security and stability". In that respect, the Group also underlined the importance of Lebanon's policy of disassociation and the Baabda Declaration of 12 June 2012.

Today, more than ever, such support is needed to help shield Lebanon from the spillover of the Syrian crisis and from my country being turned anew into a battlefield of regional rivalries and proxy wars.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Khalil (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to congratulate the Kingdom of Jordan on its accession to the Security Council and on its assumption of the presidency in the first month of its tenure. I would also like to congratulate Chad, Nigeria, Lithuania and Chile on their joining the Council. I would like to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning and to reiterate Egypt's support for the statements to be made by the representatives of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The Palestinian question remains unresolved, despite the many efforts by the international community, including the Security Council, since the establishment of the Organization, with serious repercussions for the Palestinians and all countries of the region, as well as international peace and security. That is most clearly reflected in the recent atrocities at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria, where Palestinian refugees are dying of starvation in the second decade of the twenty-first century. That also applies to Gaza, where the population

still suffers from an illegal blockade. It also applies to Israel, which continues to feel threatened despite its sophisticated arsenal of weapons of mass destruction and its superiority in traditional weapons and their means of delivery.

The past quarter has seen a number of important developments that reflect how critical the situation in Palestine has become.

The first development is the relentless commitment of the United States to help both sides to reach agreement, including consecutive high-level visits by the Secretary of State to the region to secure that goal. We strongly support those efforts and look forward the achievement of a just solution that guarantees the establishment of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State on all the territories occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security side by side with the State of Israel.

Secondly, statements were issued by senior Israeli officials that questioned the two-State solution and the availability of a real partner for peace. The same officials raised new and controversial issues that could complicate the prospects for reaching an agreement. The Prime Minister informed his party's Cabinet members that he would not accept any reference to Jerusalem in the framework agreement, and insisted on the acknowledgement of Israel as a Jewish State and on keeping additional illegal settlement blocks under Israeli sovereignty. The Minister for Foreign Affairs proposed a plan to exchange and transfer populations, in addition to the exchange of land. The Minister of Defence criticized the security plan proposed by the United States, and insisted on keeping Israeli troops in the Jordan Valley for security reasons. The former chief of the Mossad recently reaffirmed that the Jordan Valley was not essential to Israel's security.

Thirdly, the third batch of Palestinian prisoners have been released. That is a welcome development. However, it was followed by a call for bids to construct thousands of new units in settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank. France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy conveyed to the Israeli Ambassadors in their respective capitals messages that such steps did not help the peace process. The Israeli Government ignored those messages and summoned its Ambassadors from those countries in protest to the messages, which were aimed at implementing international law and Council resolutions. Egypt looks forward to action by the Security Council aimed at halting all subversive attempts to undermine the peace process, and to further measures by the European Union. We welcome the suspension of the Dutch water company's cooperation with its Israeli counterpart because of Israel's illegal settlement activity, and its suspension of further investments in Israeli banks that finance settlements.

Fourthly, Palestinians remain subject to attacks by settlers and Israeli security forces in the occupied territories. Israel's continued retaliatory air raids and shelling of Gaza have resulted in a number of injuries and casualties. A number of short-range missiles were fired into Israel as well. However, there were no reported injuries or casualties.

Pressure was also exerted on the Palestinians to give up their rights, which have been recognized under international law and endorsed by both the General Assembly and the Security Council, in exchange for promises to slow down Israel's abuse of those rights.

The events of the past three months prove that the security of Palestine cannot be achieved without guaranteeing the security of Israel, and vice versa. Security is indivisible and can be achieved only through a peace that respects the right of others to exist and provides a fair opportunity to live a normal life. We hope that all efforts will lead to the establishment of a peace based on mutual interests, not on a balance of power.

I now turn to the situation in Syria, which has become extremely urgent. Egypt reaffirms the need to reach a political solution through dialogue. Egypt supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and the Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States for Syria, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, in coordination with Russia and the United States, to convene the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We also commend the brave decision of the opposition to participate in the Conference. We urge opposition members not to change their minds.

We call upon both the Government and the opposition to participate seriously in developing the necessary arrangements for a transitional period that secures the territorial integrity and social cohesion of Syria, in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex), which was endorsed by the Security Council. We also reaffirm that the events in Syria should not divert the attention of the Security Council from implementing its resolutions on the

illegality of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan, and on the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan and other Arab-occupied territories.

Before concluding, I would like to commend the efforts of Ms. Angela Kane, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Special Coordinator of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Mission on eliminating Syria's chemical weapons programme. The Council has only partially implemented resolution 687 (1991) on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. It has not followed up on the implementation of paragraph 14, which noted that such actions would represent steps towards the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone freee from weapons of mass destruction.

Chemical weapons were used in Syria last August. Should we wait for another tragedy to occur before the international community seriously and impartially deals with the real sources of danger in the Middle East? Egypt has reiterated its commitment to ridding the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction, and launched an initiative in that regard on 28 September. We call on all States of the region and the five permanent members of the Security Council to respond positively to our initiative. We also call on the Secretary-General and the parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to redouble their efforts to convene the long-awaited conference on declaring the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, so as to ensure that the region is free from all sources of danger for future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month and to wish the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan every success. I am also pleased to congratulate the Jordan on its membership of the Council, as well as the other new members. I wish to emphasize our absolute support for you and our preparedness to extend all possible support to bring about the success of your mission. I also thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, and wish to express my delegation's support for the statements to be made on behalf of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

I would first like to welcome the designation of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It expresses the solidarity of the human conscience and international will with the Palestinians' rights to equity and justice. The Palestinian people have been deprived of those rights for more than six decades. Israel continues to dash the remaining hopes towards achieving a just and comprehensive peace that would end the occupation and give rise to the birth of an independent State of Palestine within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Peace-loving peoples still cherish the hope that solidarity with the Palestinian people will translate into a tangible reality, to be experienced by the Palestinians in security, freedom and peace, thereby fulfilling the resolutions of the Security Council. Unfortunately, they are still trampled upon by the Israeli occupation forces with no fear of any deterrence or punishment.

As we move into 2014, is it possible that we forget the hopes attached to the advent of last year, 2013, and the efforts deployed to revive negotiations to achieve a just and final resolution to the Palestinian question. Despite the impetus, endeavours and anticipation, Israel continues to flout the will of the international community, defying all international resolutions, including those adopted by the Council. We are now witnessing the expansion of the settlements, in contravention of international law. There is also the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the continuing collective punishment of the Palestinian people and the blockade against Gaza.

While the forces of the occupying Power have released some Palestinian prisoners, they have at the same time continued to detain hundreds of others, including some aged between 15 and 18 years. That is in addition to the recurrent attacks by settlers against the Palestinians. At the same time, in some cases the victims are being urged to absolve the culprits of responsibility.

The coercive policies of the occupying Power have deprived the Palestinian people of their basic right to live in peace, dignity and freedom and exercise their right to self-determination. Any attempt to hold the Palestinians responsible for the increased

tensions — by resorting to the flimsy pretexts for the continuing blockade policy or for the preparations for further attacks — is completely unacceptable. No one should be deceived by such distortions of reality. The occupation is the crux of the matter. Ending the occupation will allow peace, justice and stability to prevail. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, strongly deplores the recurrent attacks and provocative actions in Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

We condemn all attempts to alter the historic and religious identity of the holy sites and call for the immediate cessation of any attempt to demographically alter East Jerusalem, including the campaign to destroy Palestinian homes, strip Palestinians of citizenship and evict them by forceful measures that violate international humanitarian law. We deplore the declaration to build 1,400 more residential units east of occupied Jerusalem and in other occupied Palestinian territories, including the construction of settlements in southern Al-Quds, which cut off historic lines of continuity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Will 2014 witness the long-awaited moment of truth, namely, the two-State solution? I recall the statement made by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, that the continuation of settlement activities does not conform with the two-State solution, as well as the statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, that the situation has become very complex in the light of Israel's continuing settlement activities. He emphasized that the United Nations cannot reconcile settlement expansion with achieving the two-State solution.

Achieving the two-State solution may be impossible. We have only to recall and heed the statements made by the Prime Minister of Israel in December 2013, that Israel would not stop, not even for one moment, its ongoing settlement project.

Saudi Arabia emphasizes the statement made on behalf of the League of Arab States and its resolution 7719 of 21 December 2013, underscoring the importance of abiding by the Arab Peace Initiative and of holding the Israeli Government responsible for hampering the progress towards peace. The resolution also called on the United States, as the sponsor of the current peace negotiations, and the other permanent members of the Security Council to compel the Israeli Government to halt settlement activities and to fully lift the blockade against Gaza. We also emphasize that final status issues, including Jerusalem, the borders, refugees, security and water, must comply with relevant United Nations resolutions and not violate any rights guaranteed by international law.

Incomplete sovereignty over any part of the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Jordan Valley region, is unacceptable. We call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, the Sheba'a farms area and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory. An agreement that is not based on justice and equality will lead to a vicious cycle of failed negotiations.

We have carefully listened to the statements noting that the decisions required by the peace process demand courage on the part of decision-makers. That does not apply selectively to one party, but not to another. It also applies to the peace process sponsor. The international community must not allow the Council's resolutions to be undermined by efforts to apply the law of force, which leads to flimsy results dictated by internal affairs and narrow-minded interests. We call for courageous leadership that demands the recognition of rights, without circumventing international law or legitimacy. In that context, justice and equity will lead to the achievement of peace.

The current situation of sisterly Syria represents the greatest humanitarian tragedy of the century. The Syrian authorities are subjecting their people to genocide, using all types of weapons, both conventional and non-conventional, including chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombings, Scud missiles and barrel bombs. The regime is antagonizing its people and cannot protect them. The international community must accelerate efforts to protect the Syrian people.

Eyewitnesses from Syria have visited the United Nations and the Council to provide testimony about acts of terrorism to which they had been subjected. It is a war of starvation and subjugation that seeks to humiliate, while fanning the fuel of sedition and sowing malcontent. They described the situations of those who are starving in Damascus, Al-Hasakah, Madamiya and Yarmouk, which contain more than 20,000 Palestinian refugees. We are wondering, as are the refugees, how it is possible for the Council to remain unable to adopt even one statement deploring the gravest violations of international humanitarian law.

We emphasize the need for foreign combatants to leave the Syrian territory. The spread of foreign armed groups is of grave concern. My delegation emphasizes the fact that States that have influence on the Syrian regime must focus such pressure on it, in order to halt the massacres and pogroms it has been perpetrating for the past three years.

My delegation appreciates the strenuous efforts undertaken by the United Nations organs to unconditionally deliver humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. The Security Council must hasten to adopt a decisive resolution on delivering humanitarian assistance to all parties in need, wherever they may be, and to impose deterrent sanctions on those who impede such actions.

We are about to convene the second Geneva Conference on Syria, based on the hope that the Secretary-General's call to convene the meeting will continue, based on the framework of the first Geneva Conference, to form a transitional Government with broad competencies covering the State facilities, including intelligence, security and political affairs sectors, and to realize the aspirations of the Syrian people and its ambitions for freedom and dignity, in a manner preserving the territorial integrity, safety and rights of the Syrians, with respect for their various factions, creeds and categories.

No one should forget the main goal of the second Geneva Conference on Syria. All those invited must agree to the requisites of the invitation and officially declare their acceptance, first and foremost to the establishment of a transitional Government. We therefore believe that inviting Iran is out of the question, in particular as it has military soldiers hidden by the regime. Its participation is thus invalid at this juncture.

The international community must not waste this opportunity saving face, and the States sponsoring the Conference and the United Nations must respond to the appeal to rescue the sisterly Syrian people. Those with the blood of the Syrian people on their hands must not participate in shaping their future. Furthermore, they must not be granted impunity for their crimes against humanity.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for organizing the first open debate of the year. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his comprehensive briefing.

This debate is taking place just two days prior to the beginning of the second Geneva Conference on Syria in Montreux. The holding of the Conference and the political push that it will certainly generate are a welcome and necessary development. Brazil is ready to contribute to a positive outcome to the Conference, which should mark the opening of a dialogue between the Syrian Government and opposition groups to end the violence and to ensure that peace is fully re-established.

Brazil has consistently advocated for a peaceful solution to the current conflict and supported the launching of a Syrian-led political process that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people while preserving the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. The presence of a vibrant community of Syrian origin in Brazil only increases our interest in contributing to peace in that sister nation.

We remain convinced that an agreed transition that halts the violence in Syria is still possible. At the same time, it is also true that, had the principles and guidelines agreed upon in the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/523, annex)been put into effect earlier, the urgent task of restoring peace to a war-torn country and neighbouring areas would have been less formidable today. In Montreux, we look forward to the beginning of a process that will lead to the formation of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, established by mutual consent.

We underscore that the parties must create a positive atmosphere for negotiations and, having embraced the path of dialogue, reject once and for all the illusion of military victory. The Syrian Government, which has the primary responsibility in that regard, must cease all armed violence, release arbitrarily detained persons, including the more vulnerable, in particular women and children, and allow full humanitarian access to people in need. The Syrian armed opposition must shoulder its responsibilities and reciprocate and bear in mind that humanitarian obligations apply to all armed parties. There will be many obstacles, but the process must be sustained. All the relevant stakeholders should be allowed to participate, without exclusions. All must refrain from aiding and abetting extremist groups and those who wish the process to fail. The influx of weapons to all parties in Syria should cease immediately.

Brazil continues to be extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria and in neighbouring countries, such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, which have been receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees throughout the conflict. In order to mitigate that precarious and tragic humanitarian situation, Brazil has made important financial contributions, including during the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, held last week in Kuwait with great success. We have constantly urged all parties in Syria to allow full and unhindered access by humanitarian staff and assistance to the civilian population. At the same time, in line with the reports of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, we reiterate our grave concern about the negative impact that unilateral sanctions are having on the living conditions of the Syrian people.

Brazil is deeply concerned about the increase of instability in Lebanon. There has been a series of violent acts by armed groups across Lebanon, especially in Tripoli, and terrorist bombings that caused death and injury among the population, including murdering a Brazilian citizen in Beirut. We join the Security Council in condemning those heinous crimes. The international community must keep up its support for Lebanon's State institutions, including the army, and for the fight against terrorism.

We welcome the opening, on 16 January, of the trial at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, nearly nine years after the attack that killed former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and 21 others.

As the homeland of millions of Lebanese descendants and with a Brazilian community living in Lebanon, Brazil reiterates its readiness to help Lebanon face current challenges. Brazil fully supports the important work carried out by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which has been a key player in the promotion of stability in Lebanon and instrumental for security along the border between Lebanon and Israel.

The current instability in Iraq and the increasing number of civilian victims reinforce our perception that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through unilateral actions without Security Council authorization.

Brazil has welcomed the resumption of direct final status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, in the hope that the talks will lead to the realization of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. We commend the efforts undertaken by the international community, especially by United States Secretary of State John Kerry, and encourage him to continue to pursue a comprehensive peace agreement.

We regret, however, that after encouraging news regarding the release of Palestinian prisoners, the Israeli Government has announced plans for the further construction of settlement units in the Palestinian occupied territory. Those settlements are illegal and undermine the peaceful solution of the conflict. The logic of following confidence-building measures with confidence-sapping actions is detrimental to the process.

At the same time, Brazil strongly condemns the renewed rocket launches from Gaza into Israel, which are contrary to the cause of peace and only trigger more radicalization.

Brazil once again calls for the Security Council to fully carry out its responsibilities and provide support for the peace process. We also continue to expect that the Quartet will play a proactive role and report regularly to the Security Council. In that regard, a support group to the Quartet with wider geographical representation might provide badly required impetus to its activities.

We also underscore the importance of the participation of Israeli and Palestinian civil society in the creation of conditions for the success of the peace process. Brazil remains ready to support and engage in their initiatives towards reconciliation and sustainable peace. Brazil welcomes and fully supports the launch of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Finally, we are encouraged by the signing of the joint plan of action on Iran's nuclear programme by the five permanent members of the Security Council and Iran. We commend the goodwill demonstrated by Tehran in the negotiations, under the leadership of President Hassan Rouhani. We hope that the positive dialogue between the parties will lead to a comprehensive solution, the lifting of sanctions and an encompassing agreement as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also commend your initiative in choosing

the theme of today's debate, namely, "The situation in Middle East, including the Palestinian question", which is so important given our support for the cause. We hope for success for the current efforts as we begin the new year.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in which he highlighted the principled positions that he has consistently put forward regarding the conflict.

Our debate today coincides with the declaration adopted two days ago in Marrakesh during the twentieth session of the Al-Quds Committee, presided over by the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, and with the participation of the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas. It was an opportunity to highlight the efforts being made by His Majesty, as President of the Al-Quds Committee, and to express respect for the identity and symbolic value of Al-Quds, as well as to address all practices that are detrimental to it, including the building of settlements in that city where all inhabitants coexist. While explaining the objectives of the meeting, His Majesty stated that he wished to send a message to the entire world showing that "we are a nation that supports peace and a coalition between civilizations and cultures".

The declaration adopted at the session also reaffirms the key importance of the cause of Jerusalem for the Islamic nation, given that Jerusalem lies at the heart of a political solution and that any attempt against the Al-Aqsa mosque would lead only to an escalation of violence and increase the level of despair and could have harmful consequences for the region, which would undermine any possibility for peace.

Secondly, the Security Council was invited to remain abreast of the situation of tension in Jerusalem, given its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Thirdly, the Committee reiterated that the establishment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East was the goal towards which all States members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Group are working, consistent with international law and on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map, with a view to enabling the people of Palestine to establish their own independent, fully sovereign and geographically unified State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Fourthly, the Committee stated that the negotiations held between Palestine and Israel since July 2013 represented an important step towards achieving peace in a manner consistent with resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process. The Committee reiterated the importance of addressing any action that is contrary to the objective of peace and that could strengthen the occupation.

Great hopes have been invested in the negotiations that are being conducted with great determination by Secretary of State Kerry to carry the process forward and bring the people of the region closer to a comprehensive and just peace, in keeping with the desire of the international community as expressed in the context of the Organization since 1948.

However, the possibilities of success for the negotiations will remain slim as long Israel does not respect the need to end the occupation, allow the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and abandon the settlement policy, which we have repeatedly denounced, as it is contrary to the principles underpinning the negotiations.

Despite the experiences of the Palestinian people since 1948, including with policies of displacement and confiscation, they have always worked to pursue their inalienable rights. Their leader, President Mahmoud Abbas, has given tangible and consistent proof of their commitment to dialogue and negotiation as means of achieving peace.

Israel must shoulder its responsibilities and work in a positive and serious manner with the American mediation so that negotiations can be successful, in keeping with the resolutions adopted on the basis of the current situation, because any further failures could lead to greater extremism, violence and reprisals, which the peoples of the region cannot deal with given the current crises.

The tragic situation in Syria is deteriorating on all fronts and is now reaching the end of its third year, with all that implies in terms of victims and destruction across the entire spectrum of Syrian society. This has also affected neighbouring States, which have shown unprecedented solidarity. To express our own solidarity with the brotherly Syrian people and to alleviate the

burden on neighbouring countries, the Kingdom of Morocco has established a hospital in the Zaatari camp in sisterly Jordan.

In two days, the second Geneva Conference on Syria will be a true test of the possibility of laying the foundation for political dialogue in a manner consistent with the aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people, in the context of a democracy that includes all of the Syrian people and that guarantees the sovereignty and unity of sisterly Syria.

The Kingdom of Morocco stands ready to contribute, along with the Security Council and the international community, to launching a dynamic that will put an end to the bloodshed and revive hopes for a political solution so as to ensure stability.

Turning to Lebanon, the Kingdom of Morocco welcomes the policy pursued by that country. My country reiterates its support for the independence and unity of Lebanon, thereby reaffirming our belief in the ability of the Lebanese people to rise above through the difficult circumstances that they are experiencing today.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan): As I take the floor in the Security Council for the first time this year, I would like to say how glad I am to see your Royal Highness presiding over the Council during the month of January, only one month after your country's election. I wish every success to Jordan and to the other newly elected Security Council members — Chad, Chile, Nigeria and Lithuania. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Today I will touch upon two issues: first, the Middle East peace process, and secondly, the situation in Syria.

First, I wish to express my heartfelt condolences to the Government and the people of Israel over the sad passing of Mr. Ariel Sharon, former Prime Minister of Israel.

The direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine are now entering a crucial phase. We have fewer than four months left for a deal to be made. This nine-month time frame for the negotiations had been agreed upon by both parties last year.

We would once again like to call upon both parties not to take unilateral actions that might negatively affect the peace process, but rather to continue negotiations. In that context, we deeply deplore the decision made by the Israeli Ministry of Housing and Construction on 10 January to publish tenders to build new housing units in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We believe that helping Palestinians create viable economic foundations will contribute to advancing the political process. Given the current phase of negotiations, it becomes all the more important for the international community to work towards the coexistence and prosperity of Palestinians and their neighbours. From that standpoint, Japan will continue with its own initiatives aimed at mobilizing private-sector investment in Palestine. As I said in this Chamber last October (see S/PV.7047), Japan is promoting two projects — the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity and the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD). Today, let me focus on the CEAPAD.

CEAPAD was launched in Tokyo in February 2013, where Japan and Palestine co-hosted the Conference. In addition to the two hosts, seven countries from Asia — Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Viet Nam, Brunei Darussalam and the Republic of Korea — as well as five international organizations, including the United Nations, participated. It is a process aimed at mobilizing and sharing East Asian economic development experiences and resources for the sake of Palestinian development.

As a follow-up, Japan hosted a private sector promotion meeting in Tokyo last December. Participants explored ways to strengthen the Palestinian private sector and to enhance their business relations with Palestine. The outcome of the meeting will be submitted to the second ministerial meeting of CEAPAD, scheduled to be held in Indonesia in March. We are grateful to Indonesia for hosting the Conference and we hope that it will result in tangible outcomes. For its part, at the meeting in Indonesia, Japan is planning to announce additional and substantial assistance for Palestine.

Turning to the situation in Syria, the successful conduct of the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria is of the utmost importance in moving the political process forward. Foreign Minister Kishida will represent Japan at the Conference. Japan strongly urges both the Syrian Government and the opposition parties to engage seriously and constructively in direct negotiations, with a view to putting an end to all forms

of violence and establishing a transitional governing body in accordance with the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

The political process needs to be sustained by international efforts designed to step up humanitarian assistance on the ground. We would like to express our appreciation to the Government of Kuwait for hosting the pledging conference for Syria on 15 January and for making a very generous pledge on that occasion. At that conference, Japan's representative announced our country's additional humanitarian assistance in the amount of $120 million. Our humanitarian assistance, including support for neighbouring countries, since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, now totals $275 million.

However, humanitarian aid remains meaningless if it is not delivered to those in need. Japan therefore demands that all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, take the necessary steps to ensure immediate, safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas affected by the conflict.

In addition, I would like to reiterate Japan's commitment to providing the greatest possible cooperation towards the disposal of Syria's chemical weapons. In that context, my Government has decided to contribute a total of $18 million to the trust funds established under the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Masood Khan (Pakistan): We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing today. We congratulate Chad, Chile, Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria for assuming membership of the Security Council. We especially thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan, His Excellency Mr. Nasser Judeh, for presiding over the morning portion of today's meeting. I am especially pleased to see Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein preside over the Council this month.

This year is an important oner for locking in a two-State solution. Last week, on 16 January, the United Nations formally launched the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, expressing the hope that in coming months Palestine, Israel and the international community will intensify their efforts to find a lasting peace. The resumption of the peace process in August 2013 was a true blessing, but talks for the past six months have lingered on without producing any results. Let me add that even a halting process of engagement between the two sides is better than complete breakdown and estrangement.

We all hope that this year will be a year of decisions and an enduring political solution that will lead to an independent, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side with Israel, and both sides recognizing each other's legitimate rights. I would hasten to add that vacating occupied Lebanese lands and the Syrian Golan is equally essential.

However, talks should not drag on forever; they must produce results. Decades have already been lost, and that has kept the region in a maelstrom of conflict.

To achieve results, both sides will have to move with courage and avoid steps that scuttle the talks. Four steps by the Israeli Government can stem the downslide on the ground. First, it must stop the settler attacks. Secondly, it must halt illegal settlement activity. Thirdly, it must repeal the law passed late last year that effectively annexes approximately 29 per cent of the occupied West Bank. Fourthly, it must ease the blockade of Gaza and end demolitions and displacement there and in the West Bank.

We welcome the release of Palestinian prisoners, which is an important confidence-building measure. However, prisoner releases should not be linked to the announcement of massive settlement construction and create a false quid pro quo.

We endorse the call of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to all the parties in Syria to allow free passage to the humanitarian convoys to Yermuk carrying foodstuffs and bringing medical assistance to the besieged Palestinian refugees. At the twentieth session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's Al-Quds Committee, held in Marrakech last week, Pakistan once again expressed its consistent and unflinching support for the Palestinian cause and the full realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. Mr. Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan's adviser to the Prime Minister on national security and foreign affairs, during his call on President Mahmoud Abbas, offered assistance to Palestine for capacity-building programmes and education and training in the fields of medicine, engineering and diplomacy.

This is an important week for Syria. The planned talks in Montreux come after a long and vexing waiting period. This moment is precious; it must not be squandered. The destiny of the people of Syria

and peace and stability in that country will be in the hands of the Syrian interlocutors from Government and opposition. It is high time for the Syrian nNation to turn a new leaf. The latest diplomatic problems arising on the question of participation at Montreux should be resolved urgently so that the entire process is not imperilled or derailed. We should harness all the ingenuity at our disposal to salvage the talks.

The brutal Syrian conflict, which has left more than 100,000 dead and some 9 million in need of humanitarian assistance, has made one point abundantly clear — there is no military solution. The struggle to get an upper hand in the battlefield kills Syrians. It does not bring peace. It is also clear that no political solution is possible without the mutual consent of all sides. We urge all participants at the Conference in Montreux to commit to engagement and dialogue until they produce a blueprint for peace and transition.

We pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, the United States, the Russian Federation and regional Powers for investing their political capital in the Geneva process. We support the call of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the immediate cessation of mass executions and killings by some armed groups committed in violation of international law.

Finally, we call on all sides in Syria to cease, or at least pause, all military operations for the duration of the Montreux talks.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your leadership and the work you have done as President of the Council during the month of January. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

The regular review of the issue of the Middle East requires us to consider the other issues that concern the region. That is even more true in the light of the ongoing challenges that threaten to destabilize it. In that light, diplomacy and dialogue appear to be the best way to achieve a long-term solution in each of the conflicts in the Middle East. Of course, each situation has unique features that preclude the use of identical formulas in all situations. In accordance with those ideas, I will briefly refer to two of the conflicts that we consider to be of particular importance: the conflict in Syria and the peace process in the Middle East.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, Guatemala believes that the first step to move forward any dialogue should be the cessation of violence, and in the Syrian conflict that premise is indisputable. For almost three years, that conflict has destroyed a people, all sense of the value of human life, and respect for human rights, all of which underscores the fact that armed struggle cannot be an option. If what both parties seek is the welfare of their people — as they have claimed on several occasions — they must also be willing to engage in a political dialogue and seek a permanent solution to their differences, including the establishment of a transition Government. That is not easy, but there is no alternative. The international community should support that commitment.

The delayed call for an international conference on Syria — which has been announced for 22 January — opens the door for dialogue. In order to seize that opportunity, however, it is necessary for both the Government and opposition groups, as well as other States that have been invited, to participate constructively. They must see it for what it is — the only way to end the violence. It is encouraging that both the Government and the opposition groups have sent signals that the effects of armed conflict may be mitigated, including the possibility of opening humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas. However, even more important is the effective and responsible participation of those who can stop the armed struggle.

With regard to the peace process in the Middle East, recent events make us question the possible outcome. The rejection of formal negotiations, the refusal to change traditional positions and, in general, the taking of unilateral decisions that undermine any progress suggest that there is little interest in or intention to reach a solution of two States living in peace under safe borders. Nevertheless, from our perspective it remains the only viable option for peace and security.

We are aware of the enormous challenges to both parties in that process, both nationally and internationally. We therefore hope that in the remaining time, the parties can work positively to meet the established deadlines. We believe that the involvement of the international community, especially the Quartet and regional actors, is essential throughout the process. Similarly, we must call on both parties to avoid all acts

that could jeopardize the ongoing discussions, including the expansion of settlements. We hope that the parties can demonstrate their maturity and commitment to the principles that unite us, and minimize all the differences that hinder progress towards a peaceful solution.

In conclusion, in order to reconcile conflicting positions it is necessary to maintain a constructive dialogue. That is the only way to avoid greater evils which, if continued, will eventually undermine the stability of the entire Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to welcome, through you, Mr. President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and thank him for presiding over this meeting. I would also like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council this month. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today.

In their statements today, some delegations have deliberately referred to the situation in my country, Syria, in a provocative and misleading manner. They have cited a number of false allegations and accusations that only serve to support terrorism and extremism in Syria and in the region, and to divert attention from the core matter under discussion, which is how to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, and not the domestic affairs of the countries of the region. On that basis, I will not respond, under this item, to the statements of countries that support, arm, harbour, train and incite terrorists and facilitate their infiltration of Syrian territory across our borders with neighbouring States. Those statements encourage extremism and devastation in Syria and feverishly aim to thwart any possible solution to the Syrian crisis, including efforts undertaken to convene the second Geneva Conference, which the Syrian Government has agreed to participate in without preconditions.

It is well known that the United Nations bears a historical and legal responsibility for the establishment of the independent and sovereign State of Palestine. That responsibility dates to the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 1947, which partitioned Palestine, and 273 (III), which endorsed Israel's membership in the United Nations, based on its commitment to United Nations resolutions relevant to the establishment of the State of Palestine and the return of Palestinian refugees to their land. However, what happened after that was just the opposite. Fully supported militarily, politically and economically by its protectors and sponsors, Israel launched one aggression after the other against the people and States of the region, implementing an expansionist policy that resulted in occupying territories in a number of Arab countries in 1967.

Furthermore, successive Israeli Governments have perpetrated systematic and documented violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. Settlement activities have always been a top priority for the policymakers of successive Israeli Governments, in spite of the fact that those activities — as recognized by everyone, including Israel's supporters — undermine the possibility of creating a contiguous and viable State of Palestine, as well as the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people.

Israel has not stopped there. It has organized State terror reaching beyond the region, imposed racist laws, desecrated Islamic and Christian holy sites, expelled Palestinians from their homes and arbitrarily detained and inhumanely tortured Palestinians, including women and children, and the democratically elected leaders of the Palestinian people.

In the same context as the Israeli policies I have just mentioned, the suffering of the Syrian people under occupation in the Syrian Golan has been going on for almost half a century. Israeli settlement activities continue in the occupied Syrian Golan, where the Syrian population is subject to heinous policies of suppression, racial discrimination, detention, torture and depravation of their natural resources, including oil, gas and water. They are also deprived of the right to learn the Syrian national curriculum. Their right to carry their national identity cards is also denied. Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan receive no medical care and students are not allowed to study in Arabic or to use the Syrian national curriculum. Health workers wearing the symbol of the Syrian Red Crescent are not permitted to work in the Syrian Golan. Moreover, a separation apartheid wall is being built to the east of the Syrian city of Majdal Shams. Israel also refuses to remove mines that have been planted on Syrian territory there.

The Israeli occupying Power bears full responsibility for the consequences of its support and assistance to the terrorist group in the area of

separation in the occupied Syrian Golan, in blatant violation of the disengagement agreement of 1974, the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and international law. Israel's support for terrorists endangers the lives of United Nations forces and undermines their work. This has been demonstrated in reality when such terrorist groups have kidnapped UNDOF peacekeepers, fired upon them or targeted their sites. We have informed the Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) of the details of those incidents and formally requested an investigation into the collusion of Qatari intelligence in the kidnapping of Filipino peacekeepers. What is surprising is that DPKO has to date failed to report on the results of that investigation, if such an investigation has even been conducted.

In the light of the documented and authenticated facts to which I have just referred, it is only natural to discuss the issue of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories on the United Nations agenda. What is strange and unacceptable, however, is that the resolutions adopted by the United Nations go unheeded by the Israeli authorities in their intransigence and total lack of will to follow up on their implementation, in addition to the irresponsible support provided by some powerful States for Israel's ongoing occupation of Arab territories, in disregard for all relevant resolutions.

The failure of the United Nations to shoulder its historical and legal responsibilities should not continue, nor should the failure to implement the relevant resolutions on ending the Israeli occupation, including resolution 497 (1981), aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan. In order to maintain what is left of the credibility of the United Nations, it is imperative that certain States end their policies of double standards and turn their words into action by forcing Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions so as to end the occupation and the unprecedented calamity to which Arab citizens have been subject for decades.

We must not delude ourselves or deny the truth. Israel is a settler entity that was established on the basis of occupation and expansion, and has never been interested in peace. It has responded to all peace initiatives and negotiations by raising such invalid pretexts as security concerns, only to enforce occupation and impose a fait accompli that cannot be changed. It has done so by building and expanding settlements, threatening Arab territories and changing historical and demographic characteristics. Any criticism of such actions makes Israel throw up its arms in protest, while any discussion of the untold suffering of the Palestinians is always controversial.

No just, lasting and comprehensive peace process in the region can be successful without honouring the well-established terms of reference, especially United Nations resolutions. Those terms of reference are the only basis for any settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, regardless of any other explanation or judgement that contradicts them and free from any Israeli attempt at extortion, bargaining or to link the peace process to other issues.

The nations of the region aspire to peace and prosperity and to ending the state of instability and tension. But Member States that have worked against the fulfilment of this goal and contributed to the creation of volatile hotspots throughout the region are nurturing the violence and fuelling regional clashes based on ethnic, sectarian and religious reason with a view to lifting international political and diplomatic pressure from Israel and to ending any hope of ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories.

I mentioned earlier that, in their approach to the situation in Syria, certain States have focused on certain issues that they consider important enough to raise in this meeting while deeming it appropriate not to discuss to the fullest the issue at hand — putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and attaching comprehensive and lasting peace. That is to say, we have been ignoring the elephant in the room.

Although all of this has been discussed, no one has spoken of the importance of fighting the international terrorism that has ravaged Syria. In scores of letters to the Security Council, we have described and detailed the many dangers posed by this terrorism. Terrorism entered our country through its north-eastern borders. However, I would like to remind everyone that it is the same terrorist group — the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant — that has struck both Iraq and Syria. This fact is well known to all. Some have condemned its activities in Iraq, but they have not been able to utter a word condemning the existence of the same terrorist organization in Syria.

It is truly shameful that hypocrisy should reach such levels, at a time when we have presented the Council with the names of hundreds of dead in Syria — Saudis, Turks, British, American, Canadians, Australians,

Libyans, Tunisians and others. All those have died on Syrian territory. At a time when the Foreign Ministers of the United Kingdom, France and other countries, including the chief of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation, have admitted their fear of the return of the terrorist elements who are shedding Syrian blood in Syria to their home countries. If they continue to shed Syrian blood in Syria that is fine; but for them to return to their homelands in the West, that is a problem for them. Preferably, they should continue to shed the blood of Syrians in Syria and not return to their Western States of origin. "Kill the Syrians and let the Syrians kill you". That is the solution. "But do not come back to your capitals because you are unwanted." It is as if those terrorists left their countries wearing invisible attire and as if their Governments had no knowledge of their departure.

Turkish freight trucks sent by the Turkish Government, supposedly carrying humanitarian assistance to Syria, were stopped by coincidence on Syrian territory by the police. It turned out that they were filled with weapons, and not with medication, milk for infants or warm clothes for the refugees. No, they were filled with weapons. However, those weapons, according to the Turkish Government, are humanitarian assistance. Those freight trucks were stopped. When they were searched and the weapons discovered, the Head of the Turkish Government laid off hundreds of police officers, judges and other people involved because they uncovered this deceptive action at the Yarmouk refugee camp, the home of Palestinian refugees — our brothers, our sisters — until a decision is made by the United Nations for a return to their occupied territories.

The same delegations have ignored the declaration from Damascus by Palestinian Minister of Labour Ahmed Majdalani that terrorists, Islamists and religious people, financed by Saudi Arabia and Qatari intelligence, are the ones who fired against the convoy of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that was attempting to enter the refugee camp. The Director of UNRWA was there, as was the Palestinian Ambassador to Damascus and the Palestinian Minister of Security, and they were all witnesses to the firing on the assistance convoy attempting to enter the Yarmouk refugee camp.

There is much to be said. However, I will not delve into further details, as the subject under discussion is that of the question of Palestine and of putting an end to the Israeli occupation. If some Arabs are going to please Israel by their actions, I will not do the same.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I join other speakers, Mr. President, in commending you for convening this important debate. I wish to express my personal pleasure at seeing you presiding over this body.

Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The year 2014 will be a critical one for the Middle East. We made a good start by launching the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on 16 January, and the second Geneva Conference on Syria, to open in Montreux. We hope that the launch of the International Year will generate further support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and, with it, statehood for the Palestinians.

We are encouraged by the diplomatic engagement by the international community. Peace negotiations need to be conducted expeditiously and be consistent with the principles of international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. As has been stated during this debate, we also believe that the cost of failing to reach a peace accord could very well bring another round of serious violence, with tragic consequences. We hope that the parties concerned will not let go of this opportunity to achieve a sustainable peace when there is much international goodwill supporting the process.

The ongoing settlement activities, which are illegal under international law, need to end at the earliest possible date for a sustainable solution in that region.

The situation of the blockade of the Gaza strip is an obstacle to the peace process. The recent floods, which displaced approximately 10,000 people, inflicted extra misery on a population already under strain. Gaza is also suffering from serious fuel and power shortages. Although partially relaxed, there is an urgent humanitarian need to lift more comprehensively the restrictions on imports of essential supplies of food and medicines and construction material. We reiterate the call for the full implementation of the resolution 1860 (2009), and underline our strong support for the work

of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The security needs of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples must also be respected. Indiscriminate attacks against civilians will only enhance feelings of suspicion and insecurity and widen the gap between the parties. We encourage both parties to exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

We welcome the recent release of long-term Palestinian prisoners by Israel, which will contribute positively to the ongoing negotiation process. We also hope that the issue of the detention of children, which is linked to broader, long-standing concerns regarding the detention of Palestinians, will be urgently addressed.

The President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, during his recent visit to Israel, Palestine and Jordan, reiterated his strong hope for a peaceful and sustainable solution to the Palestinian question and an independent Palestinian State. He was particularly encouraged to observe that the people of Palestine are persevering with determination, in the midst of much hardship, to realize their goal of statehood. Agreements were signed between Sri Lanka and Palestine to establish a Sri Lanka-Palestine Joint Commission and a vocational training centre.

Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. Sri Lanka is hopeful that both Israel and Palestine will utilize the opportunities presented during this year to achieve a historic peace agreement in the interest of their future generations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Allow me to begin, Mr. President, by expressing our sincere thanks to you for convening this open debate. My appreciation also goes to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing.

I wish to associate my statement with the statements to be delivered later by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Djibouti on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, respectively.

We gather today at a time when trepidation remains persistent in the Middle East and the weapons are far from silent, but when there is genuine hope in the hearts of all men and women who care about Palestine and about peace that remarkable progress can be made in 2014.

We are pleased to recall that you, Mr. President, assured us last week at the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that the Palestinian question remained not only a priority for the Council but was also its greatest test. It is the strong belief of Indonesia that the ability of the Council to pass that test and bring about a permanent solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will not only elevate its stature but also set a positive example with regard to all the other challenges it confronts. The question is whether the Council has the political will and courage.

The pursuit of peace is now even more important following the overwhelming decision of the General Assembly last year to designate 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On that subject, Indonesia welcomes the continuous efforts of the United States Secretary of State to convince the relevant parties to move forward towards a firm and lasting resolution.

Other issues concerning the Palestinian people that Indonesia would like to highlight today are social and humanitarian issues. We note with dismay continued Israeli practices that contravene its responsibilities as the occupying Power. Israel remains persistent in its violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people. While we welcome Israel's recent freeing of 104 prisoners, it is deeply perturbing to know that it still detains hundreds of Palestinian children, including those below 16 years of age. Indonesia is also saddened to learn that thousands of Palestinians are still languishing in Israeli prisons, suffering in poor conditions and lacking medical facilities.

Indonesia is appalled to learn of Israeli policies involving the destruction of wells and water infrastructure during military operations, thereby denying many Palestinians access to clean water. We also demand that Israel take the necessary measures to prevent Israeli settlers from attacking Palestinians and

from desecrating religious sites in the City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Indonesia remains steadfast in its belief that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is itself a violation of international law and international human rights law. Accordingly, we join other States to demand that Israel make the best use of the remaining three-month period of negotiation to rectify its illegal actions and start respecting the will of the international community.

Indonesia reiterates its support of the road map of the Quartet and the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and under the parameters established in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the road map of the Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, the three phases of the Madrid road map and the principle of land for peace. We believe that the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, on the basis of the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the only way to set things right for the Palestinian people. To that end, we again call upon Israel to resist the constant temptation to ignore the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians concerning the core issues of settlements, the status of Jerusalem, refugees, security and permanent borders.

Disappointingly, Israel continues to ignore the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the resolution of the General Assembly concerning its illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, including in and around occupied Jerusalem. Israel has no right to separate Palestinians from Palestinians, and Palestinians from their land. Their illegal settlement policy remains the biggest obstruction to peace in the Middle East.

Indonesia's support for the Palestinian people is unwavering. With that in mind, it gives me great pleasure to announce that Indonesia will host the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development later this year. The Conference, which the Government of Japan initiated last year, will reinforce various existing initiatives aimed at bolstering Palestinian development.

I should now like to turn to the issue of Syria. For more than two years, an extreme humanitarian tragedy has unfolded in Syria. Death, destruction, displacement and misery persist despite the strong words that have been spoken and appeals that have been made at various Security Council meetings. It is time for members of the Council to set aside their political differences and work together earnestly in the cause of peace. The Council must underline its relevance by using its authority to enforce peace, partly by ensuring that its decisions are implemented by the parties concerned.

Indonesia reiterates that the conflict in Syria must stop immediately. All parties must cease acts of violence and hostility, uphold international humanitarian law and ensure unfettered and safe humanitarian access for those in need. Accordingly, Indonesia welcomes the convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, which is scheduled to take place within a few days. Our fervent hope is that all parties to the Syrian conflict will heed the appeal of the international community and participate in the Conference in good faith. We believe that an inclusive political process that reflects the wishes of all Syrians is the only possible way to reach peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Jordan, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January.

I also wish to associate myself with the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We take this opportunity, in conjunction with the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to reiterate our support for the State of Palestine. The launch of the International Year of Solidarity, last week, only strengthens the legitimacy of the Palestinian people's struggle against the illegal occupation by Israel. Yet the question of Palestine remains unresolved on the agenda of the Council. What we have observed so far only emphasizes that a just and lasting solution is long overdue.

Malaysia reiterates its commitment to the realization of a two-State solution based on the borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. We continue to call on all parties to live up to their obligations under internationally recognized initiatives such as the Arab Peace Initiative, the Oslo Accords, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We further recognize the tireless efforts of United States Secretary

of State John Kerry to facilitate the resumption of direct negotiations between Palestine and Israel.

However, instead of adhering to the principles of the initiatives I have just mentioned, Israel continues its defiance against the wishes of the international community. Secretary Kerry's efforts have been met with ridicule by Israel, while European Union Ambassadors to Israel have been summoned for rightly speaking out against illegal settlements.

It is clear to us that this intransigence will lead to the failure of the talks, which already appear to us to be one-sided against Palestine. The discussions on core issues must not be compromised or delayed. We fear that the window of opportunity for a peaceful solution is in danger of closing altogether, as the occupying Power has proven it is unwilling to meet all its commitments. In that regard, Malaysia strongly condemns the announcement of new settlement activities by Israel, and we demand a resolute end to that continued illegal practice. Settler violence against Palestinians, including destroying their agricultural land and places of worship, continues unabated.

Malaysia also remains gravely concerned by the situation in Gaza, where the illegal blockade continues to suppress the lives of its citizens. The escalation of Israel's military activities in recent days further threatens to exacerbate the dire humanitarian situation. The food and energy security needs of the people remain at critical levels, while farmers and fishermen in the security zone are denied their livelihoods by the occupying Power. As Vice-Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Malaysia has seen and heard more than enough evidence of that oppression. We call for an immediate end to the blockade, as well as all other illegal Israeli practices in the Gaza Strip.

Let me now turn to the situation in Syria, where the international community faces an ever-increasing humanitarian crisis. As a demonstration of our concern, Malaysia participated in the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria last week in Kuwait, where we pledged $500,000. We continue to urge all parties to end the violence and human rights violations, including against innocent civilians. While we welcome the recent delivery of aid to Palestinian refugees in camps of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Yarmouk, we remain particularly concerned that they continue to face unbearable human suffering. All responsible parties must allow for the appropriate measures to be taken to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided to those desperately in need.

In two days, the long-awaited second Geneva Conference on Syria will commence to follow up on the 30 June 2012 communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). Malaysia remains supportive of the efforts of the Secretary-General and Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and calls on all parties to come together to work towards a political solution that is Syrian-led and inclusive. We hope that the parties concerned will be able to put aside their differences in order to ensure a viable and sustainable outcome that will benefit the people of Syria.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, Malaysia reiterates its objections to Israel's actions, including the construction and expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan, which violate international law and the United Nations Charter. In that regard, Malaysia calls for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan, in line with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981).

The spillover effects of the Syrian conflict to Lebanon continue to escalate. Malaysia urges the parties involved in that conflict to cease cross-border fire and other violence. My delegation also reiterates that Israel must cease its violations of Lebanese sovereignty and other hostilities, and withdraw its troops from Lebanon, with full respect for the Blue Line, in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, Malaysia underlines its firm belief in a moderate approach to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, which can bridge differences and restore stability to the Middle East. Whether in the Palestine-Israeli negotiations or the streets of Beirut, or even at the negotiating table at the second Geneva Conference, the voices of moderation must prevail over the voices of those who espouse hate, ignorance, violence and extremism. We should summon the collective political will to commit to a moderate course, which will secure greater gains than if we were divided by conflict.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to start by conveying my congratulations to all the new members of the Security Council — Chad, Chile,

Jordan, Lithuania and Nigeria — and would like to congratulate the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan upon your assumption of the presidency, Sir, to preside over the work of the Security Council this month. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing today.

My country's delegation wishes to align itself with the statement to be delievered by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I should like to add the following points.

First, Tunisia wishes to reiterate its firm position in favour of the legitimate aspirations and yearnings of the Palestinian people to realize their liberty, freedom, dignity throughout the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, in the framework of the two-State solution pursuant to the Arab Peace Initiative, the resolutions on land for peace and the Madrid agreements. We reiterate the importance of the Palestinian issue as part of the Middle East as a whole and that continuing to work for historic justice for the Palestinian people, which has evaded them for the past four decades, is the reason for all the tension and conflicts that have wracked the region.

Second, my delegation therefore wishes to stress that the year 2014 should be one of solidarity with the Palestinian people, in the search for a fair, comprehensive and lasting solution to the issue of Palestine so that peace and security prevail in a lasting way throughout the region.

Third, convinced as we are that there is no other solution than that of peace, that should happen through new prospects being opened up for the people of the region. For that reason, we support the negotiations under way between the Palestinians and Israelis under the aegis of the United Nations. We hope that the negotiations will achieve a fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, enabling the Palestinian people to again enjoy their full rights, ending the occupation by Israel of Palestinian occupied territories and resolving a number of other issues, such as borders, security, East Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and the fate of Palestinian detainees.

Fourth, my Government places on Israel the responsibility for the obstacles to peace — by way of provocative statements, the actions of the occupation forces and of Israeli settlers targeted at Palestinian citizens, and the building of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, and especially in East Jerusalem.

Tunisia condemns the repeated aggression in Jerusalem targeted at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In that regard, we reiterate the statement at the end of the twentieth session of the Jerusalem Committee, which took place on 15 and 16 January. We also condemn Israeli practices aimed at changing the very identify of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We encourage the international community assume its responsibilities vis-à-vis Jerusalem.

Fifth, we wish to point out the danger inherent in the practices and violations that run counter to international law and international legality. We call on the international community, including the United States, the sponsors of the negotiations currently under way and the members of the Quartet and the Security Council as a whole, to prompt Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to those practices and end its settlement activities, which are the main obstacle to the peace process, so as to ensure that we do not lose the historic opportunity of these negotiations, which should enable us to reach a lasting settlement regarding all outstanding issues.

Sixth, we reiterate the importance of lifting the blockade that is asphyxiating Gaza, putting an end to the very serious consequences that stem from it and which deprive the Palestinian people of the necessities of daily life. Especially affected by this are women and children.

Seventh, my country also wishes to reiterate the importance of putting an end to Israeli incursions into Syrian and Lebanese territories.

Eighth, we express our concern regarding the situation in the sisterly State of Syria and its impact on neighbouring States at the humanitarian level. In that respect, we reiterate our support for the second Geneva Conference on Syria to achieve a political settlement of the crisis through an agreement among all Syrian parties to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people, to ensure that they are able to achieve their yearning for freedom and democracy while preserving Syria's sovereignty and unity.

Ninth, Tunisia would like to reiterate its firm condemnation of the use of chemical weapons during the conflict under way in Syria. We urge that those

responsible for those crimes be brought to justice. In that regard, we welcome the joint mission of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons aimed at putting an end to the use of such weapons. My delegation hopes that this will serve as a positive step towards convening an international conference on the Middle East becoming a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as soon as possible, in order to promote peace and stability in the region and around the world.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): At the outset, allow me to express our sincere congratulations to Jordan for its membership in the Security Council for the 2014-2015 term and its presidency of the Council for the month of January. My delegation has full confidence that Jordan will make a significant contribution to the work of the Council in the coming two years.

The year 2013 was another year that regrettably ended without any concrete advancement towards bringing an end to the oldest conflict in the Middle East. Sadly, we continued to recite over and over again the litany of unacceptable settlement and demolition activities; acts of settler violence; violations of the basic rights of the Palestinians in the occupied territory; provocations against religious and holy sites, including the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque; the continuation of the illegal embargo and the construction of the separation wall in defiance of international law and Security Council resolutions; and the most regrettable loss of lives and injuries on both sides.

However, the initiative and dedicated efforts of United States Secretary of State Kerry encouraged us to welcome 2014 with optimism for a genuine chance that would lead to the two-State solution, which we have long yearned for.

Turkey sincerely supports the ongoing talks between Israel and Palestine towards a just, comprehensive and lasting resolution based on the concept of two States, living side-by-side within the pre-1967 borders in peace and security, through a just settlement of all final-status issues on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

However, in order to achieve that most-desired outcome, the parties must refrain from actions that undermine the negotiations. At a period when we need to foster confidence-building measures, each and every step taken should be well-planned and taken with caution. For instance, the systematic coupling of prisoner releases with new settlement announcements is not helpful if the parties are sincere about the process.

The basic prerequisite for progress in the peace process is to fully understand the linkage between security and a just peace. Only a just and comprehensive settlement to the conflict will provide a true, lasting peace and a secure, stable and prosperous Middle East. Meanwhile, the responsibility on the shoulders of the international community has not lessened. We will all be morally accountable if this window of opportunity for peace once again slips away.

The General Assembly has proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This should be a year for all of us to mobilize our means and capabilities to support Palestine in the economic and political realms. A politically and economically strong Palestine will surely be a stronger partner for Israel and the entire neighbourhood for years to come. Turkey therefore supports the inalienable right of the State of Palestine to sit among us, under this roof, as an equal Member of the United Nations and fully recognized by the international community. Needless to say, Palestinian reconciliation constitutes an integral part of that strength.

For our part, Turkey will continue to do its best in alleviating the difficulties of the Palestinian people through various multilateral and bilateral projects in Palestine. Two recent examples have been the transfer of $850,000 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to be used in the provision of fuel for generators for critical service sectors such as health, water and sanitation in Gaza, and the launching of the Jenin Industrial Zone Project, in the West Bank, which aims at creating business and employment opportunities for the Palestinians in the area.

However, those initiatives can yield effective results only in an economy that is functioning at full capacity, where there are no restrictions on the access of goods and labour. Movements in and out of Palestine and the contiguity between Gaza and the West Bank are of vital importance. We therefore call once again for an immediate lifting of the embargo on Gaza, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009) and the ceasefire commitments of November 2012. The recent flexibility extended for access for materials for United

Nations projects is welcomed by many, but declared not enough by many more, considering in particular the damage caused by the recent severe weather conditions in the region.

Another source of optimism is the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria, wherein the countries invited and representatives of the European Union, Arab League and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, together with United Nations officials, will try to boost the chances for a political solution to the Syrian crisis, based on the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex). Turkey looks forward to a genuine process, through the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers by the mutual consent of the two parties.

However, just as important as the commencement of the Conference is the grim reality on the ground in Syria, where innocent people continue to be killed every day by bullets, indiscriminate aerial bombardments, ballistic missiles and, last but not least, epidemic diseases and hunger while under siege. The recent wave of escalating attacks against Aleppo is extremely worrisome. That brutality must end. There should be an immediate end to the hostilities and violence, and the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15) should be implemented immediately in its entirety. Reports of the eventual access of the humanitarian convoy to Yarmouk is only partially comforting, as we know that it is not a long-term remedy. Sadly, there are still hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who have yet to be reached.

On the other hand, the burden of the humanitarian crisis on neighbouring countries has reached intolerable levels, posing a threat to not only domestic but also regional instability. We would recall that the Governments of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in a meeting that took place in Sanliurfa, Turkey, on 17 January, appealed once again to the international community to boost solidarity with countries in the region hosting the majority of refugees fleeing Syria. We call once again on the Security Council to devise an effective strategy under Chapter VII to end this, the biggest humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century.

Despite the full mobilization of the international community to implement resolution 2118 (2013), the first benchmark for the elimination of the chemical weapons declared by the Syrian regime has not been met. That is not acceptable. As we have legitimate security and environmental concerns, we shall continue to closely monitor the timetable devised by the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We would also like to take this opportunity to underline once again that paragraph 4 of resolution 2118 (2013) envisages the complete destruction of Syria's chemical-weapons programme.

I must clarify the facts regarding one particular accusation by one speaker. Recently, Turkish authorities confiscated material allegedly bound for Syria. Those incidents are a testimony to Turkey's commitment to international norms and is proof that Turkey is a State governed by the rule of law. Investigations are being carried out accordingly. Having said that, Turkey will stand by the Syrian people, and its humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people will continue.

While the Middle East is going through a turbulent period, we may well be within reach of putting an end to the long-term Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is time for us all to work together to achieve that goal and for both parties to show the necessary leadership and political will to prevent a failure, which we may not be able to afford.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Sheikha Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and your delegation on your election as a member of the Security Council and on your assumption to the presidency of the Council for this month. I wish you every success. By the same token, I would like to congratulate the other Member States that acceded to the Council this year and to thank the outgoing members. I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing this morning.

Today we are discussing the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, in the light of international impetus resulting from the efforts of the American Administration to reconcile Palestinian and Israeli viewpoints and to reach an agreement between Palestine and Israel. The peace process is the best way to achieve stability in the region. The question of Palestine is a critical issue for all Arabs. Qatar and all Arab States reiterate the Arab commitment and the basis and principles set out in the Arab Peace Initiative to achieve the comprehensive peace in the region to which they aspire. It is important that any agreement

recognize Palestinian national rights and be based on putting an end to the occupation, the achievement of self-determination, the restoration of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, and withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. It must also underscore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In that connection, we would like to state that, in order for any agreement to succeed, Israel must refrain from threatening the establishment of an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State. We would like to reiterate our warning with regard to the consequences of Israeli policies that are an obstacle to peace. Such policies include in particular its fait accompli strategy, its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the use or threat of use of force, the exploitation of Palestinian national resources, especially water, the continuing detention of Palestinians, the demolition of homes and villages, expulsions, the ongoing attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the blockade on Gaza. We underscore the need for the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights and we continue to express our solidarity with the Palestinians. That people's acquisition of their national rights is a precondition for the settlement and peace to which we aspire.

We would also like to emphasize the need for Palestinian national reconciliation on the basis of the Doha and Cairo agreements. The international community must pave the way for achieving such a reconciliation.

The beginning of a new year in the Syrian revolution doubtless provides the opportunity to pause and reflect on the grave human rights violations and war crimes perpetrated by the regime with impunity. According to international organizations and human rights groups, the Syrian Government has used chemical weapons and taken the lives of tens of thousands of Syrian civilians at the hands of the regime and its loyal militia.

Is it possible that some people still listen to the claims of that regime? We help to combat terrorism and must remember some facts. As the new year begins, the Syrian regime is continuing its indiscriminate bombing of civilians and its criminal bombardment of Aleppo, discharging barrel bombs on densely populated areas and schools. The number of victims of barrel bombs exceeds the total of chemical weapons victims. The Syrian regime continues to besiege hundreds of thousands of people and to pursue a policy of starvation to death. It impedes access to humanitarian assistance. There is also the deadly blockade of the Palestinians in the Yarmouk camp. More than 40 children, women and elderly people are dying of starvation. Is that part of fighting terrorism or terrorism itself?

Syrian refugees continue to flood into neighbouring States. We thank Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and all neighbouring States for their efforts to alleviate the suffering of Syrian refugees. The international community must continue to provide assistance to those countries. I would also like to thank the Government of Kuwait and the Secretariat for having convened the second International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria.

The events in Syria require the international community, including the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities in the face of this unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, which has led to louder voices calling for further pressure and the adoption of a decisive resolution so as to stem the suffering of the Syrian people, put an end to the criminal actions and bring the perpetrators of such crimes to justice. The convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria requires the international community to assume its responsibility in achieving the aspiration of the Syrian people for freedom and decent living conditions. We hope that the Geneva conference will find a solution. The Syrian regime must not be allowed to mark time and continue its war of genocide against the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: As this is the first time that I speak in the Council under your presidency, Sir, let me begin by congratulating you on having assumed this high office.

In the interest of time, I will read out a slightly abridged version of what we had prepared. The full text will be circulated to delegations.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Iceland, the former Yugoslav Republic of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Association

country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union fully supports the peace conference on Syria that will take place on 22 January in Switzerland. The second Geneva Conference on Syria should be the first step in a process that leads to a political solution to the conflict. The only solution to the conflict is a genuine political transition based on the full implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and on preserving the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. We commend the efforts of Joint Special Representative Brahimi and his team.

The objective of the Conference is the formation by mutual consent of a transitional governing body with full executive powers, including over security, the military and intelligence. Any elections in Syria should take place only within the framework of the Geneva communiqué. The regime as well as the opposition must commit themselves to the full implementation of the communiqué as a matter of urgency and demonstrate that commitment through their actions. The European Union calls on all parties to engage constructively in a genuine negotiation.

The European Union welcomes the invitation sent by the Secretary-General to the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. The EU stands ready to assist the opposition delegation, led by the National Coalition, in needs that might arise as part of the negotiation.

The European Union considers it important throughout the Geneva process to also work on promoting confidence-building measures that directly benefit the local population. We remain gravely concerned about the continuing and indiscriminate bloodshed among the civilian population and call for the cessation of all violence to allow urgent humanitarian access on the ground. We strongly condemn the regime's escalating indiscriminate attacks, notably in Aleppo. The European Union shares the growing concern about the spread of extremism and extremist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat Al-Nusra. Their involvement in the conflict poses a threat to the peace process, the territorial integrity of Syria and to regional and international security. The European Union welcomes the Syrian opposition coalition's condemnation of all forms of terrorism and extremism, and the fact that the moderate opposition is opposing extremist groups.

All efforts must be channelled towards the common goal of rebuilding the country, rid it of its authoritarian past, preserve its traditions of interreligious, inter-ethnic and cultural coexistence, and ensure full respect for all human rights. The European Union is concerned about the plight of all vulnerable groups and ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians.

The European Union has consistently supported civil society groups. Member States have also provided assistance and capacity-building, including through recent events such as the Cordoba conference, and will continue to do so throughout the Geneva process.

The European Union stresses the importance of an inclusive Syrian peace process and supports the active and meaningful participation of women and civil society in the overall political transition process. We encourage both parties to appoint women to their delegations to the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We also call upon the United Nations to facilitate the participation of women's groups and civil society organizations in Geneva. In that context, we also welcome the meeting on the theme "Promoting women's engagement in the Syrian political process," convened by UN-Women and the Netherlands on 12 and 13 January.

The European Union will continue to defend human rights and will remain active in ensuring accountability for the widespread and systematic violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Syria. The European Union reiterates its call to the Council to urgently address the situation in Syria in those aspects, including on a possible referral to the International Criminal Court, as requested in the letter from the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the Secretary-General of 14 January 2013 (S/2013/19, annex). We recall that all those responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes must be held accountable, and reaffirm our support to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, established by the Human Rights Council.

Following the second Kuwait donors conference, on 15 January, where the European Union and its member States pledged €550 million, the Union will continue to urge progress and engage its partners in the framework of the United Nations-led high-level group on humanitarian challenges. We call on all the

parties to the Syrian conflict, in particular the Syrian Government, to immediately implement in full the provisions of the presidential statement of 2 October 2013 (S/PRST/2013/15). Considering the unprecedented scale and nature of the crisis, we call for a humanitarian resolution by the Security Council.

The European Union urges all parties to the conflict, in particular the Syrian Government, which has the greatest responsibility in enabling humanitarian access, to take decisive steps to facilitate safe, unhindered and immediate access to all people in need, including those in besieged areas, through the most effective ways, including across conflict lines and borders, and to protect aid and medical workers and health facilities. We will continue the ongoing efforts to support Syrians affected by the conflict inside and outside Syria, as well as the hosting communities and governmental institutions of Syria's neighbours that have courageously welcomed refugees.

We welcome the start of the transfer of chemicals from Syria for destruction outside the country, but much remains to be done, including the actual destruction of the chemicals. Therefore, that step must be followed by swift and decisive action by the Government of Syria to meet all its obligations and commitments under resolution 2118 (2013) and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Executive Council decisions. We have provided assistance to the joint mission and to the OPCW trust fund. We will continue to give financial, political and logistical support. We would also like to emphasize the responsibility of the Syrian authorities to cover the costs associated with the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons stockpile.

The European Union calls on all foreign fighters in Syria, including Hizbullah, to withdraw immediately.

With regard to the Middle East peace process, the European Union commends the leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu and fully supports the tireless efforts by United States Secretary of State John Kerry. The European Union recalls previous European Union Council conclusions that laid forth its vision for a two-State solution resulting in an agreement on all final-status issues, ending all claims and fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of both parties. The European Union stands ready to contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements for ensuring the sustainability of a peace agreement.

We have decided that we will provide an unprecedented package of European political, economic and security support to both parties in the context of a final status agreement. In the event of a final peace agreement, the European Union will offer Israel and the future State of Palestine a special privileged partnership, including increased access to European markets, closer cultural and scientific links, the facilitation of trade and investments, as well as the promotion of business-to-business relations. Enhanced political dialogue and security cooperation will also be offered to both States. In case of peace, the European Union envisions a future relationship between itself and the two parties that will not only deepen the bilateral ties between the Union and the two States; it will also help develop a positive interdependence and a new mutually beneficial peaceful relationship between Israel and Palestine.

The European Union is convinced of the positive role that countries in the region can play in advancing the peace process, and remains committed to its ongoing dialogue with the Arab States, including with regard to achieving peace in the Middle East. The European Union reiterates the strategic importance of the Arab Peace Initiative for all parties and for the entire region. The current negotiations represent a unique opportunity that must be seized for both parties to implement a two-State solution. A one-State reality would not be compatible with the legitimate, sovereign and democratic aspirations of any of the parties.

It is important to increase mutual trust between the two parties. Actions that undermine the negotiations and diminish the trust between the negotiation partners should be avoided at any cost. In that regard, the European Union deplores Israel's continuous expansion of settlements, which are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. The European Union also expresses its grave concern regarding incitement, incidents of violence in the occupied territory, house demolitions and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza. The European Union expresses its serious concern about actions that undermine the status quo of the holy sites, including in Jerusalem. The European Union will continue to closely monitor the situation and its broader implications, and will act accordingly.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time that Cuba takes the floor this

year, we wish to congratulate all the new members of the Security Council. We also commend the presidency's initiative to convene this debate.

Cuba supports the statement to be made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The Middle East continues to draw the attention of the international community owing to the various events in the region in the course of the past year and the long-standing hope for concluding a peace process. The Security Council's consideration of this matter has been extremely protracted, and the major problems remain, especially the question of Palestine. Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories constitutes the main obstacle to achieving peace and a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the Middle East.

It is imperative that the Security Council play its due role in defence of international peace and security, adopting concrete, practical measures to bring Israel to put an end to its acts of aggression against the Palestinian people.

Israel's actions deliberately contravene resolutions of the United Nations, pose a threat to regional and international peace and security and violate the human rights of an entire people. There will never be peace in the Middle East as long as such aggression continues and the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are not upheld and taken into account.

The General Assembly took a historic decision when its members granted Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the United Nations. Cuba supported that decision, in keeping with its historical position in support of the cause of the Palestinian people and in favour of their rights. Cuba reiterates its support for Palestine's entry as a full State Member of the United Nations. The Security Council must consider and approve, without further delay, the request submitted by Palestine in 2011 to be recognized as a United Nations State Member.

The news over the past year on the return to negotiations between Israel and Palestine was encouraging. But that optimism has been cautious, as the Palestinian cause and peace in the region need to be attained through fair agreements that do not undermine the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Support must continue to be given to the Palestinian people in its legitimate claim for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba demands that Israel comply with international law and put an end to its occupation of all Arab territories. We reiterate once again our position in favour of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East region.

The Palestinian people suffer as a result of the growing number of illegal Israeli settlements, the harsh and distressing reality of Palestinian prisoners and the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the besieged Gaza Strip, where residents' living conditions have further deteriorated as the unjust blockade has been maintained. Only by ending that colonialist policy, releasing Palestinian prisoners and lifting the blockade against the Gaza Strip would allow for a meaningful political process to take off and bring peace to the region.

Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in its just struggle for self-determination and welcomes the declaration of 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We hope that that decision will mark a historic watershed in the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including its full-fledged membership in the United Nations.

Cuba continues to closely follow the situation in Syria and its international repercussions. We share the concern at the loss of innocent lives in Syria, as in any other part of the world. We likewise condemn all acts of violence taking place in that country against the innocent civilian population, perpetrated by any of the parties to that conflict.

We reject all attempts to turn the alleged protection of human lives into a pretext for foreign intervention, whether directly or through support to ad hoc armed groups, including the use of mercenaries, which can only lead to destruction and augment the death toll.

We also condemn any use of chemical weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. We are strongly committed to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, as well as to strict compliance with its provisions. We welcome Syria's joining of the Chemical Weapons Convention

and the agreements reached on the destruction of its chemical weapons stockpile.

Likewise, we welcome the progress made in implementing the agreement for the destruction and verification of the Syrian Arab Republic's chemical weapons programme and the cooperation provided by the Syrian Government to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations joint mission.

The obligation of the Security Council is to promote peace and bring an end to violence; to prevent destabilization, prevent the financing, support and training of destabilizing actors; and to protect innocent people and prevent their manipulation for geopolitical ends. That is also the responsibility of the Organization as a whole.

Cuba opposes calls promoting regime change in Syria and supporting the use of force and violence instead of contributing to dialogue and negotiation among all of the parties. We also reject the complicity of the mass media, committing its customary distortion of reality with no need to face the consequences of its actions.

We reiterate the call to preserve the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and the right to self-determination of its people, without any kind of foreign interference or intervention. We call for the conflict to be settled diplomatically without further bloodshed.

We join international aspirations by investing our hopes in the prospect of the second Geneva Conference on Syria leading via dialogue to agreements ending the conflict in Syria, through a peaceful process led by the Syrian people in exercise of its legitimate right to self-determination.

Cuba reiterates its condemnation of all acts of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, by whosoever committed, including States. In that regard, Cuba condemns all acts of terrorism perpetrated in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Mr. Naanda (Namibia): I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's election to serve on the Security Council for the period 2014 to 2015, and upon your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of January 2014. Equally, I wish to thank you for having organized this first open debate of 2014 on the Middle East, which affords the wider membership an opportunity to participate in these important deliberations. As 2014 has been declared the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we look forward to participating in similar forums aiming to resolve the fragile security situation in the Middle East, in particular the question of Palestine.

At the same time, I wish to congratulate the newly elected members of the Security Council and to extend my delegation's support to them during their tenure on this body.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We remain convinced that the main political problem in the Middle East is the systematic aggression by Israel against Palestine. That continues to pose a threat to peace and security in the region. Namibia remains concerned about the critical situation and the continued illegal Israeli settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which continues to gravely undermine the integrity of the State of Palestine and threatens to make impossible the achievement of the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Of great concern to my delegation is the increasing number of Israeli settlements, which is based on an illegal colonizing policy that has resulted in the blockade of the Gaza Strip, restricted access for much-needed goods, humanitarian aid, medical supplies and fuel. The sustained Israeli occupation severely affects the socioeconomic well-being of the Palestinians, which is a flagrant denial of their right to self-determination and of their exercise of their fundamental human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Namibia believes that Israel's continuing flagrant contempt for international law demands urgent attention and responsible action by the international community, with a view to compelling the occupying Power to end all such grave breaches and salvaging the prospects for a peaceful solution in the Middle East region.

As a country that experienced similar illegal occupation by the South African apartheid regime, Namibia continues to persistently extend its steadfast support for the Palestinian people in pursuit of their inalienable right to self-determination, independence

and freedom. We will remain committed to that noble course. In that context, Namibia welcomes the proclamation by the General Assembly of the year 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with resolution 68/12 of 26 November 2013. We are hopeful that the observance of this year as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People will help bring an end to the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and the achievement of the independence of the State of Palestine, with full sovereignty and East Jerusalem as its capital.

We wish to remind the Council of its obligations to furthering the just cause of the People of Palestine by adopting practical measures to end Israeli abuses and illegal policies against the Palestinian people. It is incomprehensible that the question of Palestine remains a permanent agenda item on the Council's programme of work, considering that the General Assembly, the most representative organ of the United Nations, adopted a historic decision in 2012 by according Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. We remain hopeful that this decision will constitute an important step towards the eventual accession of Palestine to the United Nations as a full Member State. It is therefore important for the Council to respect the wish of the international community by considering and approving, without further delay, the request made by Palestine for recognition as a full-fledged Member State, taking its rightful place among the community of nations.

Namibia continues to believe that a real and lasting solution leading to the freedom of Palestine can be realized only through the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the United Nations regarding the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only by addressing the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel, the creation of the Palestinian State, ending all conflicts and bringing lasting peace and security to Palestinians and Israelis alike and to the wider region.

Let me reiterate Namibia's strong support for the ongoing peace process and our appeal to both parties to commit themselves to and embrace this opportunity by abiding by their previous agreements and obligations concerning lasting peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, living side by side.

Let me conclude by further reiterating Namibia's unwavering support for and solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just cause for freedom, independence and social justice, and Namibia's steadfast support for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Djibouti.

Miss Hassan (Djibouti): My delegation is honoured and pleased to take the floor on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

This important meeting is being held at a time when the question of Palestine is yet again at a very critical juncture. Our hopes for reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine were raised following the recent resumption of peace talks, which definitely requires the strong support of us all to ensure the advancement and attainment of their goals, in conformity with the parametres defined by relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map.

However, it is unfortunate that, in spite of those positive developments, conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, are still deteriorating as Israel continues its colonization of Palestinian land, including through Israeli settler terrorism, the arrest and detention of Palestinian civilians, and the collective punishment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip with an illegal blockade.

Israeli colonial settlement activities, which have manifestly escalated recently, remain the core challenge to making genuine progress in the peace negotiations. The matter needs to be seriously addressed by the international community if we are to salvage that solution and work towards peace. In that regard, we reaffirm that the continuation of building and expanding Israeli colonial settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in and around East Jerusalem, undermine the territorial integrity, viability and contiguity of the Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and are clearly illegal acts that constitute a flagrant violation of international laws, resolutions and covenants, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

In contradiction with United Nations resolutions and the peace process, Israel continues to defy the will of the international community by creating de facto

realities on the ground, aimed at altering the Arab character, status and demographic composition of occupied East Jerusalem, with a view to isolating the city from its natural Palestinian environs. All of Israel's unlawful activities — inter alia, settlement activities, forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians, restricting Palestinians' access to places of worship, building the apartheid wall, confiscating Palestinian lands, desecrating Islamic and Christian holy sites, and closing Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem — must be brought to an immediate halt.

We must also draw the Council's attention to the constant incitement by extremist Israelis at holy sites, particularly at Al-Haram Al-Sharif in occupied East Jerusalem. Such provocative, illegal actions are aggravating religious tensions and risk fuelling religious conflict. In that regard, we forewarn that the continuation of all such Israeli violations will lead to eliminating any chance to realize peace and eventually threaten to further destabilize the already fragile situation in the Middle East.

At the same time, the OIC reiterates its firm commitment to the rights of the Palestinian people in East Jerusalem, which forms an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and remains in support of a final solution that guarantees the return of the city to Palestinian sovereignty as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Given that the Palestine question remains at the heart of unrest in the region and has constituted a long-standing challenge to this body, the OIC group reaffirms that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East requires firm and prompt action by the Security Council to enforce international law and to ensure compliance by Israel, the occupying Power, with all of its legal obligations and commitments to ending its daily crimes and aggressions for the achievement of peace and justice.

Likewise, the OIC reaffirms the permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the Palestinian question until all of its aspects are justly and fully resolved. In this International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the OIC further appeals for the international community's sustained engagement and full support at this critical period in order to seize the current diplomatic opportunity to bring about the enforcement of United Nations resolutions and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land occupied since 1967.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including their right to return, self-determination, sovereignty and independence in the State of Palestine on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): I have circulated my statement and will therefore not read it out in its entirety.

There can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria. Pouring more weapons into the conflict will only prolong the human suffering. For this reason, Norway welcomes the Secretary-General's convening of the second Geneva Conference on Syria, and we look forward to attending. We also reiterate the Secretary-General's call to the Syrian parties to ensure the full and effective participation of women. The logic of peace must replace the logic of war.

We urge both sides of the conflict to accept the invitation to the negotiating table and to embark on the challenging process of reaching agreement on an inclusive, Syrian-led transition and solution to the conflict. Going to the negotiating table is the first step. Remaining at the table is even more important.

It is vital that the conference yield concrete results. Violence must end. Ceasefires must be declared. Immediate, full and unimpeded humanitarian access must be ensured and humanitarian principles respected. Syrian women and civil-society actors must be actively involved in the negotiations. That will increase the legitimacy of the process. The international community must come together in demanding an end to the conflict, as it did on the issue of the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. In our view, taking steps of this kind could facilitate an agreement on a transitional governing body, as outlined in the Geneva communiqué of June 2012 (S/2012/522, annex).

The humanitarian challenge is still enormous, and it will remain with us for years. We need to do even more. Assistance to Syria's neighbouring countries must be stepped up. Norway pledged $65 million in humanitarian assistance and $10 million for assisting

Syria's neighbouring countries at the second Kuwait pledging conference.

The destruction of Syria's chemical weapons is well under way under the supervision of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. Norway is proud to be a part of that joint effort to eliminate those deadly weapons. We urge all parties involved to fulfil their international commitments to ensure that the chemical weapons are removed from Syria and destroyed within the agreed time frames.

The Middle East peace process is at a decisive phase. We commend President Obama and Secretary Kerry's leadership and dedication. Norway believes that given the broader situation in the region, this is the time for Palestinians and Israelis to agree on ending the conflict. A two-State solution whereby Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security is indeed within reach. The process shows how difficult the outstanding questions are: security, borders, the status of Jerusalem and refugees. Reaching agreement involves painful concessions and tough decisions, for both sides. Therefore, we urge the leaders on both sides to show courage and determination at this critical moment. This historic opportunity must not be squandered. Norway believes that such a historic compromise will be possible only if the core needs of both parties are duly addressed, and met, in a fair and balanced way.

Norway aligns itself with the position of the European Union (EU), as set out in the December 2009 EU Council conclusions, regarding the parameters for a solution to the outstanding questions. The solution must be in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo Accords and subsequent agreements. We cannot allow the negotiations to be derailed. Norway condemns all use of violence. Norway calls for the parties to refrain from unilateral acts that could undermine the talks, change the situation on the ground or prejudge the outcome of the final-status negotiations. Settlement activities must stop.

Norway is deeply concerned about the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza. We call for the lifting of the restrictions in compliance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) in all its elements, including the need for security for all civilian populations.

The institutional basis for an independent Palestine is already in place. However, the Palestinian Authority will continue to need generous financial support from donors in 2014 to support the efforts to achieve peace. Assistance to the Palestinian Authority amounted to $1.25 billion last year, a big improvement over the year before. That still leaves a budget deficit, which will add to Palestine's public debt. Norway urges donors to remain generous in their contributions to the Authority while the Palestinians strive to reach a negotiated settlement with Israel. We plan to hold a new meeting of the donors group, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, in late spring this year, in Brussels. There, we will review assistance for 2014.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): Before I begin, let me say that, as I think I am the fortieth speaker in this debate, I promise not to speak for more than half an hour. I shall, of course, read out the short version of my statement.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). At the outset, I would like to convey the Movement's appreciation to you, Mr. President, as well as to the Foreign Minister of Jordan, for having convened this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Another year has begun, and peace, justice and stability remain elusive in the Middle East. The ongoing Israeli military occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands and the denial of the freedom and rights of the Palestinian people continue to demand the attention of the international community and require urgent action for redress, in conformity with international law and United Nations resolutions. This must be one of the priorities on the global agenda for the year 2014, a year that has been declared by the General Assembly to be the "International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People".

The Movement remains seriously concerned about the situation in Palestine as a result of the illegal policies that continue to be pursued by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people and their land. Over the past months, while the international community has been exerting efforts for tangible progress in the resumed negotiations and has articulated its full support for that process on the basis of the long-

standing parameters rooted in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, Israel, the occupying Power, has instead, regrettably, continued to behave in a manner contradictory to those parameters, to the good faith required for the negotiations and to the overarching objectives of the peace process to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution.

Tensions continue to rise and to widen the gap between the expectations for the political process and the reality on the ground. A brief review of just the recent period shows that Israeli settlement activities, including the construction of settlements and the wall and the confiscation of more Palestinian land, the blockade of the Gaza Strip, military raids and arrests, and constant violence and provocations by extremist Israeli settlers, all have continued unabated, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Such violations are exacerbating the conditions on the ground and reinforcing doubts about Israel's true intentions and commitment to the just and lasting peace that the State of Palestine, with the strong support of the international community, including the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, has been exerting serious effort to achieve.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains extremely alarmed, in particular, by the escalation of acts of aggression in occupied East Jerusalem, especially in and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque, resulting from provocations by Israeli extremists. The blatant disrespect for that holy site and those who come to worship there and the continued threats of further incursions are tantamount to grave acts of incitement that are stoking religious sensitivities and aggravating already high tensions. Israeli Government officials continue to recklessly fuel such religious tensions by encouraging extremists to acts of provocation that threaten to ignite a religious conflict that would have far-reaching and dangerous consequences for the region and beyond. Therefore, the Non-Aligned Movement once again draws the attention of the Security Council to all these serious matters that threaten international peace and security and calls for actions to halt all such Israeli incitement and for respect for the sanctity of religious sites.

NAM also reiterates its serious concern over the continued systematic Israeli violations of human rights of the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians in violent military raids, the excessive use of force against civilian protesters, the forced displacement of civilians and the arrest and detention of still more Palestinians. Despite the recent release of long-term Palestinian prisoners, Israel continues in an almost daily manner to arrest Palestinian civilians, including children. More than 5,000 Palestinians remain in Israeli jails. These are all serious concerns for the Movement.

The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip also continues to inflict grave socioeconomic losses and humanitarian hardship on the Palestinian people besieged there. NAM condemns those violations and urges the international community to persist with its calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately end the blockade and cease its collective punishment and all illegal actions against the Palestinian people under its occupation and respect its obligations under international law. If Israel persists in its contempt for international law, it will soon be high time for the international community to undertake measures to uphold the law and ensure accountability.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination and freedom in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects. It is hoped that the current negotiations will succeed within the specified time frame in the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that will bring a complete end to the Israeli military occupation of Palestine and other occupied Arab lands and usher in an era of peace and stability in the Middle East.

At this critical juncture, the Non-Aligned Movement renews its calls for continued support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate historic struggle for justice, dignity, peace and the exercise of their rights to self-determination. The Non-Aligned Movement calls for a redoubling of international efforts, including by the Security Council and in line with our political, legal and moral obligations, towards the realization of those noble objectives this year.

Lebanon has suffered from repeated Israeli attacks against its territory with a heavy human and material toll, followed by subsequent years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel continues to violate Lebanese airspace and has intensified its incursions into Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international

resolutions, in particular, resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that guarantees the consolidation of the foundations of stability and security of Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

The Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, that have been intensified since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. The Non-Aligned Movement demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I thus conclude my statement given on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I now wish to make a brief statement in my national capacity.

In the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community should exert its utmost pressure on the occupying Power, the Israeli regime, to end its aggressive and expansionist policies and non-adherence to international law, norms and principles. This year, the Security Council should fulfil its long overdue responsibility and fully support all of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people by compelling the occupying regime to withdraw from all Palestinian and other Arab territories. Without a doubt, continued inaction by the Council will only lead to more atrocities by that criminal regime which, in the past 65 years, has waged over 10 wars against all of its neighbours, continues to threaten countries of the region and uninterruptedly commits savage attacks against peoples under occupation, in particular defenceless women and innocent children, as documented by competent international organizations and as is strongly condemned by the international community, including even supporters of the regime.

The Israeli regime, which is the only regime in the region to possess every type of weapon of mass destruction but is not a party to any of the treaties banning them, should also be compelled to join such treaties, in particular the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, without any further delay or precondition, and place all its nuclear activities under the comprehensive safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in order to remove the sole obstacle to the establishment of the nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East proposed by Iran in 1974.

Over the past several months, the Middle East has witnessed the escalation of foreign-backed terrorist acts in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, targeting hospitals, schools, religious sites and diplomatic property and claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, including a diplomat from the Iranian embassy in Beirut following a terrorist attack committed by a terrorist group led by a Saudi citizen. Undoubtedly, those are only but a few of the examples of the catastrophic impact of violent and extremist narratives. Those developments gave support to the very timely action taken by the General Assembly when it rejected violent extremism and promoted moderation and tolerance through its adoption by consensus of resolution 67/127, entitled "A world against violence and violent extremism", in the final days of 2013 — a proposal that was based on an idea presented to the General Assembly by the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Finally, we firmly believe that the recent strong support of the international community for the efforts of the Iraqi Government against terrorist groups should also be extended to Syria by placing the question of combating terrorism on the agenda of second Geneva Conference on Syria. Likewise, every effort should be made to end the ongoing conflict and to support a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in order to allow Syrian people to freely determine their destiny.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Jordan on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for convening this open debate. Jordan's intimate knowledge of the conflict will no doubt be an asset to the Council's efforts to find a resolution to this long-standing conflict.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Council meets today at a moment of heightened diplomacy in the Middle East, from the second Geneva Conference on Syria, on Wednesday, 22 January, to ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine. Five months ago, following the concerted efforts of the United States, we saw a positive development in the political process with the resumption of negotiations with a view to achieving a lasting and comprehensive agreement between Israel and Palestine by April this

year. Whereas the resumption of negotiations remains a promising sign, as it has brought an end to the paralysis that plagued the peace process for some years, the parties will have to make tough decisions in the weeks ahead.

South Africa identifies with the struggle of the Palestinians for self-determination and continues to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate and just struggle for the establishment of an independent State. We welcome the launch on 16 January of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and South Africa joins other voices urging that the observance be used to redouble efforts to achieve a lasting and durable peace between Israel and Palestine. We remain steadfast in our belief that the only way a solution to that protracted conflict can be found is through a peaceful and fair negotiation process carried out in an environment conducive to fruitful deliberations — that is, an environment free of intimidation, fear, violence and other obstructionist activities.

The construction of settlements by Israel remains the biggest obstacle to progress in the peace talks. Nonetheless, Israel's illegal settlement activities continue with impunity. Again we warn that the continued settlement construction changes the geographical makeup of Palestine and could make impossible the creation of two States, in line with the overwhelming call for the creation of a sovereign, independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian State, coexisting peacefully alongside Israel, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The parties need to continue their positive confidence-building measures, and in that regard the release by Israel of Palestinian prisoners in December was a positive development. However, it is undermined by the continued arrest and detention of Palestinian citizens by Israeli authorities. Further, the release date was followed by a new barrage of illegal settlement activities with the announcement by Israel of the expansion of 1,400 new settlements in the West Bank. Those actions by Israel collectively serve to stifle the very few positive actions in the process and puts the sincerity of Israel's commitment to the peace process in question. We therefore call on Israel to refrain from actions that undermine progress in the peace talks.

We condemn all violence, which further undermines the possibility of a peaceful settlement. Mahatma Ghandi said that the worst form of violence is poverty, and therefore the continued economic and political isolation of the Gaza Strip further exacerbates the fragile political process. South Africa once again emphasizes the need for Israel to lift the illegal blockade against the people of Gaza.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process is currently at a critical point, with the renewed efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to bring Israelis and Palestinians together to agree on a framework for permanent status negotiations. The test will be whether current efforts will achieve a two-State solution and also realize the vision of an independent Palestinian State.

Allow me at this stage to turn to the situation in Syria. The continuation of the crisis in Syria is of great concern. Although progress is being made in the destruction of Syria's chemical stocks, the conflict continues. Without an inclusive political settlement, the consequences for regional peace and security will be greater. South Africa fully supports the efforts of the United Nations in bringing about a political solution to that protracted conflict, and looks forward to participating in the second Geneva Conference on Syria later this week.

South Africa has steadfastly maintained that it is an unassailable right of the Syrian people to have peace and democracy. South Africa remains convinced that in a complex, divided society, such as Syria's, there can be no military solution to the conflict, and we have condemned the continuing supply of weapons to that area, as it has entrenched the false notion that the use of arms can end the conflict. We are convinced that if the crisis continues to be fuelled with weapons, we will witness in Syria, as we have elsewhere in the world, that it is ultimately the people of Syria who will pay the price, while those supplying weapons live in safety far away from the crisis.

Furthermore, we are very conscious of the importance of a greater role for women in ending conflicts and building peace, and urge a proportional participation of women in the talks in Geneva slated to begin on 22 January. South Africa continues to maintain that the only solution to the Syrian crisis is a Syrian-owned process where all Syrian parties must take responsibility to end the violence and commit to finding lasting peace.

In conclusion, the delicate process of negotiations between Israel and Palestine requires trust, and trust is earned by action and not by mere words. We continue to believe that peace in the Middle East is dependent on the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. Vacating occupied lands is also an imperative.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): I would first like to congratulate your country, Mr. President, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for the way in which it is leading the work of the Council this month. Allow me to also personally thank you for your presence and for the statement you made on behalf of the Council at the first meeting of 2014 of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, held last Thursday.

I also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Our Committee is grateful for the continued diplomatic efforts of the international community, and first and foremost for the steadfast efforts of United States Secretary of State Kerry to encourage the parties to reach a comprehensive agreement.

The Committee calls on all parties to act responsibly so as to create a climate conducive to productive negotiations that will allow for a solution of all final status issues and bring an end to the Israeli occupation, a total Israeli military withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as well as the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

As we approach the April deadline, prospects for peace continue to be undermined by the occupying Power's actions on the ground, in particular the expansion of settlements. Israel has announced the construction of thousands of new settlement units since the start of negotiations in July, the latest of which, concerning more than 1,400 units, was announced 10 days ago. The 144 settlements, scattered throughout the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and connected with each other by roads built for the exclusive use of Israeli settlers, are totally inconsistent with the two-State solution. Their continued expansion undermines the Palestinians' trust in Israel's commitment to achieving that solution. Peace will be possible only when the occupation is brought to an end and the State of Palestine is truly independent, sovereign and viable.

Moreover, settlement activities constitute grave breaches of international law. The Committee calls on the Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to uphold international law and its own resolutions, including resolution 446 (1979), which determined that settlements have no legal validity and called on Israel to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Committee is also troubled by the recent tensions on the border between Gaza and Israel, the rockets fired from Gaza into Israel and the Israeli air strikes on Gaza, all of which could undermine the fragile ceasefire between the two sides and have devastating consequences for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

The General Assembly has proclaimed 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and requested the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to organize activities in cooperation with Governments, United Nations organizations, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. The objective of the International Year, which was officially launched last Thursday, is to promote the key theme of solidarity with the Palestinian people as a contribution to international awareness of the question of Palestine and of the obstacles to the ongoing peace process, including the illegal settlements. A wide range of activities is being organized, and we count on the entire membership, including Council members, for their cooperation and engagement to make 2014 a historic year for the long-overdue two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): My delegation congratulates you, Sir, on this month's Jordanian presidency of the Security Council, and commends your convening of this timely open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Jordan's leadership draws on insights into the region that are of great benefit to the Council, and it will be from Amman, in your own country, that His Holiness Pope Francis, as a witness to peace, will begin his own pilgrimage of prayer to the Holy Land on 24 May.

For the Holy See, the resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians constitutes a positive development, in regard to which Pope Francis has expressed the hope that both parties will resolve, with the support of the international community, to take courageous decisions. Courageous decisions are seldom easy, and can place demands on us that may be politically difficult and unpopular.

Yet when faced with the reality of conflict in the Middle East all right-minded people see the need for change. Peace is not simply the absence of war, but requires that the demands of justice be met for all peoples and communities. My delegation accordingly joins its voice once more with those of all people of good will who welcome, with great hope, the re-engagement of direct, serious and concrete negotiations so that a rejuvenated peace process may help unfold better prospects for the future.

Of great significance, furthermore, is the recent agreement with Iran with respect to its nuclear programme, which offers great hope that an era of distrust may be replaced by a new climate of trust and cooperation. It is hoped that it will be fully implemented and open the path to a definitive agreement.

The Holy See has urgently and repeatedly voiced its clear concerns for the peace and welfare of all the peoples of the Middle East. Most recently, the ongoing situation in Syria prompted Pope Francis to reiterate the Holy See's profound solicitude for the situation in the whole region. Calling the Catholic faithful to prayer and fasting for Syria in September 2013, Pope Francis made a heartfelt plea

> "that the violence and devastation in Syria may cease immediately and that a renewed effort be undertaken to achieve a just solution to the fratricidal conflict. Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake... War begets war, violence begets violence".

May the upcoming second Geneva Conference on Syria be an occasion for a renewed reflection on the criteria needed to offer a new start for that beautiful nation, left prey to indescribable destruction and loss of lives. Due to political preconditions, those criteria must include an immediate ceasefire without procrastination, including a renewed commitment to promoting initiatives of peace instead of the sending and funding of arms, which have escalated the violence and conflict.

At the same time, it must involve an immediate rollout of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction for the countless refugees and displaced persons being housed temporarily in neighbouring countries, where so many suffer life-threatening shortages, inter alia, of nutrition, safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The urgency of rebuilding peace trumps the resolution of other political and social questions, although such rebuilding will certainly need to include new forms of political participation and representation that ensures the voice and security of all groups calling Syria their home.

Pope Francis has expressed his deep concern for those experiencing relocation and displacement in efforts to escape incessant violence, as well as for those nations challenged by the influx of a great number of refugees. The international community cannot stand aloof to their praiseworthy efforts to assist. The Holy See pledges to continue — through its wide array of educational, health care and social service outreach efforts — to work alongside those alleviating the suffering of all of those who have been marginalized, uprooted or oppressed by conflict.

Many of the refugees constitute a worrying exodus of Christians from their bimillenial homelands owing, among other causes, to the targeting and instability visited upon them by fundamentalist and extremist forces. Interreligious dialogue and reconciliation will therefore be required to restore the balance in the rich and complex pluralism of Syrian society. The Holy See stands ready to support all religious communities in their efforts to reach new understandings and the restoration of trust after these years of violence, revenge and recrimination.

The Syrian people have demonstrated by their history an ability to live together in peace. Regional and international rivalries that have little to do with the Syrian communities themselves must therefore be set aside so that at the heart of the discussions are not these interests but rather those of the individual human person and the good of Syria. To this end, all the interested parties are called to work together if conditions for lasting peace are to be put in place. The second Geneva talks must accordingly ensure the inclusive participation of all parties to this conflict in the region and beyond. The Holy See wholeheartedly wishes to support this objective.

Finally, I wish to call to mind the concern expressed by Pope Francis for the ongoing political problems in

Lebanon, and also for Iraq, which struggles to attain the peace and stability for which it hopes.

For the United Nations the challenges of the Middle East are a clarion call for its peacemaking role, the very raison d'être for this institution. May this open debate help muster the much-needed political will to spur the international community to make a real difference in the lives of the peoples of the Middle East and help them to fulfil their dream of long-awaited peace.

The global economic situation no longer permits the international community to continue indefinitely to fund growing refugee populations. Political solutions are the best solutions even for the economies of these countries, because peace is the necessary precondition for the socioeconomic stability capable of attracting development funds. In his address on 13 January to the members of the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, Pope Francis therefore urged the whole world, with great insistence, to address the problems of the Middle East and to act before any further deterioration of the situation occurs.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate you Sir, on your patience and your efforts this day. I will be very brief, and will distribute the full text of my statement in Arabic and English to all representatives. The Government of Iraq also thanks the members of the Security Council for their adoption of presidential statement S/PRST/2014/1, supporting Iraq in its fight against terrorism.

I congratulate the Palestinian people on the launch of the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Another year has passed and the peace process in the Middle East still stumbles. The international community seeks to reach a peaceful settlement. Meanwhile, Israel continues to pursue its arbitrary and illegal practices, depriving the Palestinians of their rights and freedoms. Israel continues to persist in its settlement policies, constructing and building new settlements and a separation wall, and continuing to seize more Palestinian land every day. Israel has also imposed a blockade on Gaza and arrested numerous Palestinians, and continues its practice of collective punishment, in addition to the provocations posed by extremist Jewish settlers, which can only escalate tensions in the Middle East.

Iraq supports the international community's efforts to make a success of the process of peace in the Middle East, based on unwavering principles, including those enunciated in United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. We commend the efforts of the Palestinians and the Government of President Mahmoud Abbas. We also pay tribute to the continued good offices and good will of the United States to encourage both sides to reach a two-State solution to resolve the conflict. In this regard, we hold Israel responsible for not implementing binding resolutions of the Security Council and urge the international community and the Security Council to bring pressure to bear on Israel to honour its commitments and to implement the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Finally, we must work diligently to restore stability to the troubled Middle East, with all its conflicts that threaten international peace and security. Finding a just solution that will enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in a State based on the 1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem, is a noble goal to which we aspire and that would achieve security and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): Allow me first to congratulate Your Royal Highness on Jordan's assumption of both its membership of the Council and the presidency of the Council for this month.

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the Council for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I should like to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing earlier today.

The situation in the Middle East region remains fragile and unpredictable, with unprecedented changes in several countries in the region and the ongoing conflict in Syria. We look forward to the success of the efforts of the international community this week to resolve the situation in Syria.

We firmly support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders side by side and at peace with

Israel. We also continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. We look forward to a meaningful 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was launched on 16 January by the Secretary-General.

We welcome the continuation of the negotiation rounds between Israel and Palestine that began in late July last year with the aim of reaching a deal within nine months. It is unfortunate that so far there has been little visible progress, but we hope that both sides will seize the opportunity presented by direct negotiations and strike a peace deal in the critical months ahead.

The recent announcement by Israel of new settlement construction is regrettable. The settlement activities are not only illegal but also pose a threat to the two-State solution. We join others in urging Israel to stop these settlement activities.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, meanwhile, remains a cause for serious concern. The blockade on Gaza is not only adversely affecting the population but also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence, thereby further complicating the situation on the ground and increasing Israel's vulnerability and security concerns.

India has always supported the nation-building efforts of Palestine through technical and economic assistance, including budgetary support. In 2012, India pledged $10 million as budgetary support to Palestine and signed three memorandums of understanding for development projects in the fields of information and communication technology, vocational training and the construction of schools. In September 2013, India contributed $1 million as a part of its annual contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), primarily for the provision of food and medicines to the displaced people in refugee camps under the various UNRWA programmes.

We are also implementing a series of development projects in Palestine, funded by the India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum. We have thus far been able to assist in the rehabilitation of a cultural and hospital centre in Gaza, the construction and equipping of a centre for person with physical disabilities in Nablus, and support for recreational activities through infrastructure support for a football stadium in Ramallah.

India welcomes the efforts made by the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations towards the removal and elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and hopes that the Joint Mission will be able to meet the final deadline of 30 June for the complete elimination of Syria's chemical weapons programme. In December 2013, India offered a financial contribution of $1 million to the trust fund set up at the OPCW at The Hague for use in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and related facilities. India has also offered the services of its experts to be used by the OPCW in destruction verification activities and training slots for personnel participating in the United Nations-OPCW Joint Mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

In conclusion, let me express our full support for the second Geneva Conference on Syria. We hope that it will launch a Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue that will resolve the current crisis and meet the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): On behalf of my country, I warmly welcome the presence here earlier today of Mr. Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign and Expatriates Affairs of Jordan, and congratulate him on his country's election to the Security Council and on assuming its presidency for this month. I also take this opportunity to welcome the newly elected members and express appreciation for those that have completed their work on the Security Council. I offer my gratitude to Jordan's presidency for the timely convening of this open debate.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In my national capacity, I would like to inform the Council that, while chairing the OIC in 2011 and 2012, Kazakhstan, supported by all OIC member States, did its best to contribute to the peace process in the Middle East and to overcome disputes between the various parties to the conflict. One of the strategic goals of Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was to support Palestine's aspiration to take its rightful place as a full Member of the United Nations. Under Kazakh leadership, the OIC dispatched its first-ever delegation to the Holy

See to raise the issue of Palestinian sovereignty over the property of the Catholic Church in the occupied territories. We have also actively promoted the Palestinian cause in a number of international forums, and now my country, in its national capacity, is eager to continue to contribute to the international action in that direction.

From the very beginning of the conflict in Syria, my country has expressed support for all possible opportunities to arrive at a mutually acceptable formula for achieving peace between the parties. We see that the conflict continues to rage, despite relentless international efforts to halt it and to reach an acceptable solution based on international law, as demonstrated by the sincere determination of all parties concerned. The entire world, including my country, looks forward to achieving a balanced and widely agreed solution at the peace talks.

Kazakhstan welcomes the start of the process to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons stockpile, and hopes that there will be no delay beyond the end of June deadline for the total removal of all such materials. We believe that the Syrian Government will extend its full and constructive cooperation in this respect to the Joint Mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations. We are confident that those joint steps of the Syrian Government and the multilateral community will serve as yet another political and practical measure to mitigate tensions in the region.

The persistence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to threaten regional and international peace and security, and its negative implications are not confined to that region only, but are felt well beyond and around the globe. Kazakhstan supports a peaceful settlement of the problem based on international law, including compliance with the pertinent Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We support the efforts of the Quartet to restore the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process to identify borders based on the principle of the peaceful coexistence of both States.

Kazakhstan will continue to render its support to the stabilization process in the Middle East as an integral part of establishing peace and security in the region. We recognize the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of an independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, peacefully coexisting with Israel. We also advocate its efforts to obtain full-fledged membership of the United Nations.

My country condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and in this regard supports the aspirations of all the peoples of the region to live in security. Kazakhstan hopes that the efforts of the sponsors of the peace process, the international and regional organizations, and the good will of the participants engaged in the negotiation process will lead to the achievement of a lasting and just peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): Recent developments in the Middle East have shifted the focus of the international community from the Palestinian issue to more pressing items on the agenda: the situation in Syria and preserving regional stability. However, Ukraine believes that, in the current circumstances, the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian issue should remain one of the buttresses of a stable and secure Middle East. We understand the claims on both sides and think that it is only through compromise and direct Israeli-Palestinian talks that the sides will reach a final agreement.

Ukraine welcomes the efforts of the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, in advancing direct dialogue between the parties with the aim of achieving a framework agreement that would provide guidelines for permanent status negotiations and address all the core issues — in other words, a full and final peace treaty between the parties. We see some positive signs. The third group of prisoners was released in late 2013. We are very well aware that it was a very painful and difficult decision for the Israeli side. We understand the Israeli security concerns and support all initiatives aimed at elaborating adequate guarantees.

My State also understands the need to continue to assist the Palestinian Authority in building its social and economic development, which is of critical importance for the viability of a future Palestinian State and to its Palestinian inhabitants to be able to lead a normal life. We hope that 2014, proclaimed by the General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, will contribute to finding a true and durable solution to the conflict.

Ukraine supports a two-State solution resulting from successful negotiations between Palestine and Israel. We support the Palestinian people's efforts

to obtain an independent State, and we hope to see Palestinians enjoying freedom and prosperity in their own State. A historic compromise should be achieved.

That brings us to the importance of the mediation endeavours of the regional players, with Jordan being one of the key brokers. With this in mind, we support the official Jordanian position, voiced earlier this year by Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. Jordan should be part of the final agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Its position should be taken into account while settling the important issues of the status of Jerusalem, border issues, water and security arrangements.

Ukraine has repeatedly expressed its concern over the situation in Syria, where a two-year conflict continues to take the lives of innocent civilians. In that context, the important task in the short term is to ensure the holding of a successful second Geneva conference on Syria. We have high expectations for the results of that conference, while welcoming the strong diplomatic efforts of Russia and the United States. We appeal to all parties involved to overcome the contradictions that have long hindered the development of consensus on the issue of a Syrian settlement within the Security Council.

The humanitarian situation in the country is also dangerous. We call on all parties, in particular the opposition groups, to provide unhindered access to humanitarian organizations in the country in order to begin to overcome the terrible situation that is currently affecting the lives of civilians, particularly women and children. In that context, we welcome the recent international donor conference, held in Kuwait, which resulted in the international community managing to raise $2.4 billion of the required $6.5 billion.

However, benefiting from international assistance is impossible without an understanding between the parties to the conflict. We are concerned about the lack of unity inside the opposition camp in Syria and urge it to take part in the second Geneva conference in order to reach a political compromise, which is needed now more than ever. Ukraine believes that the only possible solution to the Syrian crisis is an inclusive political dialogue and the necessary transformation in the country.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Syria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Nitzan (Israel): I am compelled to take the floor again today. I will be brief.

As in previous meetings, we have heard many Arab and other representatives from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) criticizing Israel. I would like again to point out to those same representatives, Arab and others, that they choose to ignore the crimes of the Chair of NAM, Iran, at their own peril. In particular, it comes as quite a surprise that the Non-Aligned Movement has the nerve to lecture Israel on human rights, while two members of NAM, Iran and Syria, are the world's worst human rights abusers. Iran oppresses its own people and helps other States to slaughter theirs. Today in Iran, free expression is repressed, minorities are persecuted, women are denied their basic rights and the regime has executed more people than any other country in the world. Since fighting broke out in Syria almost three years ago, Iran has provided financial, political and logistical support to Al-Assad, while also sending Hizbullah militia to assist the Syrian Government forces in killing civilians. NAM's cynicism and hypocrisy is shameful.

I must admit that I was astonished to hear the Iranian representative speak about non-compliance with Security Council resolutions. How absurd that is. I wish that I could be shocked by the accusations hurled by the Syrian representative today, turning the meeting into a theatre of the absurd. The Syrian representative has the audacity to shed crocodile tears about the situation of the Palestinians, while his own Government kills and pursues a policy of starvation against the Palestinian population in the Yarmouk camp. While the Syrian Government bombs schools and kills children, the Syrian representative finds it necessary to complain here in the Security Council about the curriculum in schools in Israel. That is the theatre of the absurd at its worst.

The Syrian representative's accusations against Israel with regard to violations of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement are baseless. Syria systematically violates the Agreement and Israel only provides and will continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Golan population, including soldiers and other residents of the Golan who are severely injured. Just recently, Israel treated a severaly injured soldier of the Syrian armed forces, who came to the border asking for help. That happened only two weeks ago but, of course, that was not part of the Syrian representative's statement here at today's meeting.

I would like to respond to a State in our southern vincinity, whose representative spoke about the situation in Gaza. To begin with, there is no blockade on Gaza. In fact, all goods and humanitarian aid — let me repeat it — all humanitarian aid entering Gaza comes from Israel. It seems that that representative's concerns has less to do with the humanitarian need in Gaza and more to do with demonizing Israel. One does not need to be able to understand the writing on the Rosetta Stone to discover that Gaza has an additional entry point.

Lastly, it took a great deal of audacity on the part of the Malaysian representative to criticize the human rights record of my country. Israel is a thriving multicultural democracy, in which the rights of all minorities are respected and all religions are tolerated. That is in contrast to Malaysia, whose serious human rights violations include torture, the denial of due process and the abuse of workers' rights. That is to say nothing of the Government curtailing the right to freedom of expression and religion.

I could continue but, out of respect for the serious work before us and the limited time of the Council, I will refrain from doing so.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Syria has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Adi (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with our statements on the subject matter before us today and with regard to putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, I will respond to some comments made by the Israeli representative.

The funding of and support for armed groups in Syria by certain States are clear. As is well kown, the conflict and wars in the Middle East are caused by the Israeli occupation. That is well documented by many international organizations. Israel's history is bleak and full of slaughter. Israel has occupied the Arab territories for more than 60 years. Israeli State terrorism has perpetrated the worst crimes against civilians in the Syrian Golan, Lebanon and Palestine.

For Israel to claim to regret the situation in Syria is an attempt to divert attention from the Israeli occupation of the Golan since 1967, wreaking humiliation and slaughter, expelling our citizens and flouting all international resolutions that have urged Israel to put an end to the occupation of the Arab territories. The assistance referred to by the representative of Israel, which he placed in a humanitarian context, must not mislead the Council. Israel persists in allowing terrorists to work in the area of separation and to perpetrate their terrorist acts.

We could speak at length of Israel's actions. What we have heard today bears witness to its practices. In the interest of brevity, that is all I will say.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7 p.m.